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## BILLY BUTTON,

The Young Clown and Bareback Rider.

By LIEUT. E. H. KELLOGG.



And as they pulled lustily away, a limp, shrouded form was drawn to the top, and speedily consigned to the rubber bag. "That's the way they do it," whispered Baxter to Billy. "Now watch how easily they cover their tracks."



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# BILLY BUTTON,

## The Young Clown and Bareback Rider.

### A STORY OF THE CIRCUS.

By LIEUT. E. H. KELLOGG.

Author of "The Weird House of White Cliff," etc., etc., etc.

#### PROLOGUE.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### BEELZEBUB.

"PLAY it easy, young fellow!"

The speaker was a tall, well-built man, dressed in a plain suit of Scotch tweed.

As he uttered the words he replaced the cigar he had been smoking between his lips.

A half a dozen men, standing beside him, uttered a laugh as a tattered boy, who was standing on his head in an extemporized ring, took a sudden tumble and fetched up with a flop upon all fours, looking with dazed amazement at the speakers.

Some ten boys were playing circus on an empty lot, the site of the present Bible House, New York, with a number of their comrades as audience, and during their sports the audience had been augmented by the speaker and his companions.

As the boy, who certainly could not have been more than ten years old, partially arose to his feet, a number of his comrades made for the adjoining fence, facing Fourth avenue, and scaled it in an instant, while the remainder sat or stood undecided what to do in the face of the sudden emergency.

"Well, what you got to say about it?" asked the boy, getting up. "Didn't I play it easy, hey?"

Another laugh followed the rejoinder.

"Had you there, Wallet," said one of the men, giving the first speaker a rib-tickler. "Smart as a steel trap and apt on the ketch!"

"Bet your life," laughed Wallet, "he's a smiler. What's your name, bub?"

"Beelzebub, for what I know. What's your'n?"

A roar followed the sally.

"Put up or shut up!" said another of the party.

"I'll put up the wine," said the first speaker.

"I'll hold the stakes," said another.

Meanwhile the boys remained gazing with stupid amazement at the men.

The scene opens in the year 1850.

How much has transpired since then?

The boys playing in the open lot were a number of youths fresh from school, which had just been let out—it being half-past three or thereabouts—and the lookers-on were W. F. Wallet, the clown, and Sam Lathrop, who were not engaged in the afternoon show at the circus.

At the time mentioned the Bible House was simply thought about, not being built, and the site of the Cooper Institute was a tumble-down set of rookeries, termed Rotten Row.

"You did it pretty well, young fellow," laughed Wallet, in response to Sam Lathrop's spirited joke, "but you can't stand on your head."

"I can stand on my ear, though," responded the boy.

"Get out!"

"I will."

And in an instant the ragged, bare-footed specimen of humanity flung himself down upon the sawdust sweepings from the main ring of the circus, and poking his left elbow into the earth, supporting his body with his right hand, as he elevated himself in a graceful poise, and lowering his ear into the sawdust, spun around with the rapidity of a teetotum.

"How's that?" he asked, as the applause of his youthful admirers greeted the feat with three times three.

"That beats the deck!" shouted Wallet, holding his sides with laughter.

"Open your 'Wallet!'" roared Sam Lathrop, chucking a silver quarter to the boy.

"Pass around the hat for this 'ere young acrobat," and in a moment the jolly clown pulled off his felt and felt for his stamps. The result was a five.

And never was a boy more proud than was this young ragamuffin as he pocketed the rhino.

"Where do you live?" asked Sam, as he handed the money to the boy.

"Down yonder," was the reply, as the lad pointed towards Rotten Row. "I sleeps there and hangs around for grub."

"Grub, hey?"

"Yum!"

"Who taught you to tumble?"

"Tumble! Seed you and t'other fellers."

"Hit you to rights that time, Sam," laughed Wallet.

"Bet your life," replied Lathrop.

"Better scoop him in," said Wallet. "He'll make a faker."

"Gol darned if he won't!" ejaculated the clown, as if an idea had struck home. "Say, can you read?"

"Som'ot."

"Well, take this and call on me to-morrow."

As he spoke, Sam Lathrop took a card and hastily penciled a few words upon it, and then he handed it to the boy.

"Thankee, sir," said he, pulling the tuft of his shaggy hair, and the next moment the circus men had passed through the dressing tent, and the "play circus actors" were left alone.

#### CHAPTER II.

##### HOW THEY DID IT.

"YOU'RE a brick, Beel!" said one of the boy audience, as soon as the others had departed.

"Build on it," answered the youngster. "Say, fellows, let's go around to Shandy's and have half Spanishes all around."

Half Spanishes, by the way, were, at that period, very cheap cigars—two for a cent.

The proposal was greeted with a shout, and the next moment there was a motley crew of boys climbing the Fourth avenue fence of the open lot bounded by Fourth avenue, Ninth

street, Astor Place and Third avenue, that would have puzzled the most active of our present police force to get away with; but in those days the boys didn't bother the M. P.'s worth a cent. Oh, no!

"Say, Janel!"

"Yes, 'em," replied a trim-looking specimen of a chambermaid, as she poked her head through the open door of the basement.

"Don't let those boys be tracking through the basement this afternoon," replied a stately-looking woman who was standing upon the front stoop of a brick house on Ninth street, near Fourth avenue; "I won't have it. Bridget complains that she has altogether too much washing to do, and the boys are raising old hob with their circus business in the cellar. I don't mind their amusing themselves to keep them off the streets, but I won't have a crowd of tatterdemalions racing through the hall. Where is Eddy?"

"I'm sure I don't know, mum!" was the truthful reply.

"Well, tell him, when he comes in, what I say, and tell him that he can play as much as he likes, but I won't have the riff-raff piling through the halls—that's all."

And with a shake of her furbelowed skirts the stately matron swept away.

"What's that she says?" demanded the cook, as Jane returned to the kitchen after her mistress had gone away.

Jane repeated the message.

"Them's my sentiments intirely," reiterated Bridget, as she flourished a skimmer that she held in her hand; "it's a born lady she is, an' divil a brush I'll put on the dirty floor if it's dirtied again by the gang. I wonder where Ed and the byes are, I don't know. Here's the dumplings gittin' cold, and they'll be dead as a stone."

Where were Ed and the boys?

Let us take a trip down the cellar and see. The cellars of houses are, as a rule, rather dark spots, and this cellar in particular was not an exception.

There was an iron grating at the back that let in some light, but the remainder of the apartment resembled an Egyptian tomb.

Shortly after the demonstrative remarks made by Bridget, Jane opened the cellar door and, passing a few steps, closed it behind her.

"Mr. Ed," she said, cautiously.

For a moment there was no reply.

"Mr. Ed," she said again, presently.

"Who's that?" was the reply, in a smothered voice.

"Only me—Jane."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"You're a beauty. Is mother gone?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad of it. I'm as hungry as a hedgehog."

"Well, dinner is ready; come up and get it."



"What have you got?"  
 "Roast beef and apple dumplings."  
 "Blast the beef! Got plenty of dumplings?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Well, bring us down half a dozen. Are they big?"  
 "Yes; you couldn't eat three if you tried."  
 "I don't want to. Beelzebub's here, and he's hungry as the deuce."  
 "Poor fellow!" ejaculated Jane.  
 And then she told him what his mother had said on departing.  
 "That knocks the coal out of my pipe," said Ed, dejectedly.  
 "Fetch the dumplings, Jane," put in a cheery voice, "and give a fellow a show. Maybe I'll put up a job yet."  
 And the next moment two boys came clambering down from the top of a woodpile, on which they had been hidden. One of them was Beelzebub, and the other was Ed, the tender object of Bridget's commiseration.  
 "You'd better come up," said Jane, kindly.  
 "I'm jiggered if I do!" replied Beelzebub, making a wry face. "Bridget hates me, and I want to see what we're going to do about the show. The boys will be along in half an hour or so, and 'twon't do to disappoint 'em."  
 "But they can't come through the hall no more," said Jane; "the missus won't 'low it."  
 Ed uttered a melancholy howl.  
 "The jig's up," he said.  
 "Nary a time," snapped Beelzebub. "Fetch along the dumplings, and give the fellers a show."

And rushing up to Jane, he gave her a playful dig in the ribs, accompanied by a kiss that caused the merry girl to giggle again.  
 She pushed him away quickly, and darted up-stairs, presently re-appearing with a huge dish of steaming apple dumplings, smothered in butter and molasses.  
 The boys uttered a cry of delight, and pitching in with a will, the savory food was speedily disposed of.  
 "There," said Beel, laying his hands on his stomach, with a satisfied sigh, "there's my grace, and now for the circus."  
 "But we can't have it," ejaculated Ed, sadly; "mother says so."  
 "She didn't say you couldn't have it, did she, Jane?" asked Beel, curiously.  
 "N-o," replied Jane, hesitatingly.  
 "She said ther boys might muse themselves if we'd keep the tatter-de-malls from rumpussin' the halls, didn't she, hey?"  
 "Yes," replied Jane, to the leading question, "she said that."  
 "Well, we'll do it."  
 "How?" asked Ed, doubtfully.  
 "Let 'em through the coal-hole."

### CHAPTER III.

#### CIRCUS WITH A VENGEANCE.

"You're a trump, Beel," said Ed, his eyes brightening at the remark; "we'll have the show anyhow."  
 "You bet!" replied Beelzebub.  
 "Don't you forget it, either!"  
 Jane laughed heartily as she ran up-stairs with the dinner dishes.  
 Then the boys fell to work.  
 "How late do you think it is?" asked Beel.  
 "Nearly two, I guess," replied Ed.  
 "Well, we've got to dust lively, hey!" said Beel.  
 "How are we going to do about the door-keeper?" inquired Ed; "the fellars can't come through the hall no more."  
 "I'll tend to that," replied his companion; "let's get the traps together."  
 As he spoke the basement door-bell rang, and presently half a dozen boys, varying from ten to fourteen, came clattering down the cellar stairs.  
 In a few words they were informed of what had transpired, and then one was appointed as doorkeeper.  
 He had to shinny up the coal-hole, but the active use of a broom cleaned away the grimy dust, and then things were perfectly ship-shape.  
 Meanwhile, the others had raked the sawdust-ring which was prepared in the rear of the cellar, and put it in proper order for the performance.  
 Then the performers lit up the candles upon the hoop chandeliers on either side of the ring, and retired to the dressing-room, which was fronted by a red damask table-cloth, hung diagonally across the rear of the cellar.  
 By this time a number of boys, some well

dressed, and others of the ragged type; came sliding down the run to the cellar.  
 It was jolly fun to all, for boys will be boys throughout all time; and doubtless these boys enjoyed themselves the more by reason of the odd means they had to adopt to attend the show.  
 Notwithstanding the price paid, they were glad to take a slide to get in.  
 Said price was ten marbles, one China-ally, or thirty pins.  
 The audience seated, the entrance was closed, and the doorkeeper came down to act as policeman, and then the show commenced.  
 The first act on the programme was a *grand entree* act by the full company.  
 In doing this act the boys used the basket-horses appertaining to carnival times and Christmas festivals, that can be found at any first-class toy store.  
 The act was done in tip-top style, and from the round of applause that greeted the conclusion, it evidently pleased the spectators immensely.  
 Then came the principal act by "Master Edwards," so Ed termed himself on the bill, which was done with a brush and posted on the rear of the cellar.  
 In this act, one of the stoutest boys of the party, covered with a cloth, with padded saddle and horse's head attached, acted the part of the horse.  
 To do this he bent his body forward, holding two stout sticks in his hands as forelegs, and thus gave a rather fair representation of a horse.  
 Ed was the rider. Beelzebub the clown.  
 And Percival De Lacy, another of the lads, the ringmaster.  
 In came the Arab steed, led by a keeper, who appeared to have his hands full in managing the fiery animal.  
 "Step this way, Uncle Sam!" said De Lacy, snapping his whip with the utmost vigor.  
 And as he did so Beelzebub leaped into the ring.  
 He was dressed in a suit of extemporized tights, that might have done credit to the ablest joker in existence.  
 White and blue stripes, and his face powdered and painted in the most comical manner.  
 "And the states come also!" he shouted, as he turned a flip-flop and came down wrong end up upon the sawdust. "Did you see my agility?" he asked, as he leaped to his feet in an instant.  
 "I call it a *faux paw*," replied De Lacy.  
 "Well, wasn't I on *four paws*—what yer talkin' 'bout, hey?"  
 "Just so," replied the ringmaster, smiling, "you are apt this afternoon, Uncle Sam."  
 "Uncle Sam's apt ter be," replied Beel, "but what can I do for yer?"  
 "Please ask Master Edwards to step forward," retorted the ringmaster.  
 "Trot him out!" shouted Beel.  
 "What's that?" asked De Lacy, cutting at him with his whip.  
 "What yer 'bout?" replied Beel, leaping away to avoid the whip of the ringmaster and a kick from the untamed steed at one and the same time. "I don't like this, ther's too many snappin' turtles 'round! Master Edwards!"  
 And into the ring leaped Ed, dressed in another set of extemporized tights, which fitted closer than a glove.  
 A shout of applause and the clapping of hands greeted his appearance.  
 "Give him a hand," shouted the ringmaster to the clown, "give him a hand."  
 "Can't spare it," rejoined Beel, "I want both myself." And tossing himself on his hands, he walked around the ring feet up.  
 Snap! The whip told home.  
 "Ouch!" ejaculated Beel, resuming his equilibrium. "That's darn mean!"  
 "Why so?"  
 "Back-biting!" retorted he, scratching the injured part; "but I forgive you. What can I do for you?"  
 The latter to Ed, who was standing quietly by the untamed steed.  
 "Give me a hand, please," replied Ed, laying his hand on the horse's back.  
 "You don't know what yer talkin' 'bout," replied Beel, grinning.  
 "Why not?" demanded the ringmaster, sharply.  
 "He's holdin' out his foot, can't yer see?" rejoined Beel.  
 "Just so," answered De Lacy, nodding.  
 "Well, give him a lift, then."

Beelzebub seized hold of the extended foot, and gave Ed a lift.  
 Up he went, and the next instant he was standing on the pad, as the manufactured horse went trotting around the ring.  
 "I'll be blowed if them ain't my shirts, surer than great guns!"

### CHAPTER IV.

#### SHIRTS ARE SHIRTS.

EVERY eye turned in the direction of the speaker.  
 He was a tall, stout man, dressed in a semi-sailor costume.  
 "Oh, cracky!" ejaculated Ed, leaping from the back of the untamed steed, and diving into the dressing-room.  
 "By jinks, the jig's up!" blurted De Lacy, making for the coal-hole. "Look out for yourselves, fellers! It's Ed's sailor brother, and he and Beel have got on his shirts for tights."  
 In a moment the trappings of the horse were cast aside, and the representative of that noble animal followed De Lacy with the utmost celerity, and one of the liveliest skedaddles on record ensued.  
 Nearly everybody escaped.  
 But Beelzebub and Ed were not among the number. Unfortunately their garb precluded the possibility of a street promenade, and before they could dress, the big brother had them both captives.  
 "Where did you get those shirts, young fellows?" he demanded, sharply, half-smiling and half in earnest. "Speak out, and no bones about it!"  
 "Beel put up the job," replied Ed. "It wasn't my fault."  
 "Stole 'em, eh?" demanded the sailor, sternly.  
 "No, we only borrowed 'em. I'd scorn to steal, poor as I am—I'd die first!"  
 And he gave a defiant look at the sailor as he spoke.  
 "How did it happen, Ed?" asked his brother. "Tell me the truth, like a man!"  
 Ed hung his head, undecided what to do.  
 "Don't show the white feather, Ed," said Beel. "You didn't mean to do no wrong—and you hain't."  
 "You see, sir," he continued, addressing Ed's brother, "t'other day we was up by ther fire in the kitchen dryin' ourselves after the rain, and the girls was ironin' these 'ere shirts. I seed them hangin' on the clothes hoss, and sez I to Ed: 'Them 'ud make bully tights, they would.'  
 "How?" sez he.  
 "Just strip," sez I, "and pull the arms over your legs, and put the other shirt right side up, then use a handkercher for trunks, and you're made up in a jiffy."  
 "And that's the way you did it, hey?" replied the sailor, laughing heartily; "well, I'm blamed if you ain't a cure—I'll let you go this time for your ingenuity, but don't you let me ketch you snaking my shirts again for tights, or I'll lock you both up, now mind; strip lively and bring those shirts up to Bridget to wash, and this is the ending of your circus, mind it, Master Ed!"  
 But it wasn't, as the sequel will prove.  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 "Mother."  
 The speaker was Beelzebub.  
 He had just returned home, if the term could be applied to his wretched apartment in Rotten Row.  
 "What do you want?" replied a maudlin voice, as the speaker partially arose from a straw bed upon a cot in one corner of the room.  
 "I'm home," answered Beel, pleasantly, "and Mr. Lathrop's promised to get me into the circus; ain't it bully?"  
 "Um," muttered the woman; "got any spuds?"  
 "Why, I gave you four dollars day afore yesterday," said Beel; "ain't gone, is it?"  
 "Yes, every bloody cent."  
 "What yer done 'ith it?"  
 "Gin!" shouted the woman, waving a bottle unsteadily in her hand. "Gin! and that's gone, too, and I want more—must have it," and she fell heavily back upon the bed as she spoke.  
 "Oh, mother," groaned the boy, "why can't you stop?"  
 "I can't, and I don't want to, either," she shouted angrily. "Get me another bottle, or it'll be the worse for ye. Get it, I say!"



And she held out the bottle as she spoke, with savage exasperation.

He stood looking at her a moment or two before he moved.

"It's too bad," he muttered to himself, "but I suppose it's got ter be did—it's the only way to quiet her, poor mother."

And with a sad, dejected look, he took the bottle and descended the stairs.

He returned presently and handed the liquid death to the woman.

She took a long drink, and uttered a pleased sigh.

"It's life to me," she murmured; "life—life, and I love it."

The boy made no reply. Poor fellow, he was disgusted with his mother.

"And so you're going to work, are you?" demanded she, presently.

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Well, I'm glad of it," she retorted, savagely, as she arose on the bed, with her eyes glaring with maniacal fury. "I'm glad of it, you beggar's brat!"

"What do you mean, mother?" demanded the boy, in utter surprise, as he darted from the stool upon which he had been seated.

"I mean what I say," she replied, with an oath. "I mean what I say, curse you!"

"Mother!" he replied, darting away to avoid the blow aimed at his head, as the half-filled bottle shattered into a thousand fragments against the wall. "what is the matter?"

"Don't call me mother!" shouted the crazed woman, as the foam of madness frothed from her lips; "I am no mother of yours—nor are you kith of mine."

The boy stood gazing at her in dazed amazement.

"It's the Gospel truth!" she shouted, with a shriek of demoniac laughter which rang through the room like a wail, "and I'll swear it with my dying breath."

"Mother—mother!" groaned the boy, falling on his knees, and attempting to grasp the desperate woman, "are you mad?"

"No!" she shouted. "I have told the truth at last—and make the most you can of it!" and, before the boy could reply or attempt to prevent her she darted to the window and head first to the street below.

## CHAPTER V.

### A BLOW FOR A BLOW.

AN inquest followed, and the jury decided that the woman had committed self-destruction while under the influence of alcoholism.

Thus the matter ended.

It was the day following the funeral. The audience were coming out of the circus. And as they did so a man in citizen dress approached the ticket taker.

"I want to see the proprietor," he said, displaying a policeman's badge.

"What's the row—anything up?" replied the latter.

"Nothing important," said the officer, with a peculiar leer.

"You'll find him in the dressing tent," answered the doorkeeper, pointing through the side door; "get around to the rear, you know the way."

"Yes," observed the officer, as he disappeared through the canvas flap of the tent. He made his way to the rear and entered the dressing tent.

Nearly all the company were dressed except those engaged in the closing act. Waller and Sam Lathrop were standing near the exit of the tent.

"I want to see Will Westlake," said the officer.

"What do you want with him?" asked Lathrop, who knew the officer by sight.

"I want him on charge of stealing a set of diamond ear-rings from Mrs. William Hanlon of Ninth street."

"Don't believe a word of it," replied Lathrop, indignantly, "it's a put-up job."

"Nary a time," answered the detective.

"I've got the thing dead to rights."

"It's a lie!" shouted Sam; "poor boy, he only buried his mother yesterday."

"She wasn't his mother," replied the officer, sharply, "and you're altogether too sharp with your chin, Sam!"

"Why?"

"You called me a liar just now!"

"So I did, and I repeat it, if you say that Will Westlake is a thief."

"That's actionable," shouted the irate officer, angrily, "and I'll take you in!"

"Better not," laughed the clown; "where's your warrant?"

"Here!" snapped the officer, rolling up his sleeves.

"It's N. G.," retorted Sam.

The policeman went for him.

Sam put up, and with a stout left-hander sent him to the ground in a second.

But the officer was game; he leaped to his feet and made for Sam again.

"I warn you," said Sam, good-humoredly, "that you are the aggressor; gentlemen, I call on you to witness this assault—I am defending myself."

And again the policeman went down, with the blood pouring in torrents from his nose.

A shout of derisive laughter greeted his discomfiture.

"Enough!" said he, arising to his feet and wiping away the blood. "I don't want you now, Sam Lathrop, but I'll get square, see if I don't."

"All right, I'm your man!" retorted Sam; "you know where I live." And he tapped his arm playfully as he spoke.

"Put up, or shut up!"

"I want Beelzebub!" shouted the officer.

"Go and find him!" retorted Sam, with a sneer, as he walked away.

But the officer didn't do it, for after making a careful search, no traces of Will Westlake were to be found.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BILLY BUTTON.

EIGHT long years have passed since the opening of this tale.

Much that has transpired since then must be left to the development of our story as it rolls on with the course of time.

It is nearly two o'clock on the afternoon of a warm August day, in the year 1858.

Upon an open lot in the vicinity of Jim Remsen's hotel, Jamaica, Long Island, is pitched the spacious caravan of Sands' and Nathans' mammoth circus and menagerie combined.

The grand parade and wire ascension has ended, and the brass band inside is tooting away in full blast as the eager throng crowd and jostle each other hither and thither in their anxiety to obtain the best seats in the show.

Every one knows that circus day is the greatest day out in a country town, and this day in particular was no exception to the rule.

Nearly half an hour passed away.

The seats in the circus pavilion were crowded from ring front to the flaps of the canvas.

The band struck up a sprightly gallop, and in came the "grand cavalcade of the Knights of the Golden Fleece," as it was set down in the bill of the day.

The children crowded and clapped their chubby hands with hearty expressions of delight, and the grown folks settled back into their seats with satisfied sighs as the show began.

A vigorous burst of applause greeted the disappearance of the last knight beneath the red curtains of the dressing tent, and then the audience craned forth their necks, and bent eagerly forward to greet the appearance of "Billy Button, the Boy Clown," as he was prominently announced to be upon the flaming posters and streamers that decorated the barns and fences for miles around.

"Billy Button, the only boy clown in existence, will oblige with one of his side-splitting melodies," announced the ringmaster, retiring amid a renewed clapping of hands.

As he did so there bounded into the ring a diminutive edition of a pocket clown that might have done credit to even Gabriel Ravel or George L. Fox himself.

He was but a little over four feet high, but his stout legs, which were well set off by his striped stockings, denoted extreme muscular development, as did the broad, prominent chest and square-built shoulders.

"Here we are again, as the blind man said when he took a tumble," shouted Billy Button, suiting the action to the word with a series of brilliant flip-flaps, ending up with a square somersault from heel to heel.

"How's that for high, low, Jack and a game?"

And as the applause subsided which greeted the feat, he fell to, with a round, mellow voice upon one of the sprightly airs of those days, each voice ending with the chorus:

"You may call me a quiz, you may call me a guy,

But I doesn't like things as looks queer to the eye,

But if you likes these, why it's nothing to me,

But these are some things that I don't like to see."

The song concluded amid rounds of applause, and several minor acts followed. A slight pause ensued, and then came the grand principal bareback act of the evening, by Master William Button, Boy Clown and Champion Bareback Rider of the Universe.

A magnificent specimen of horseflesh was led into the ring by an attendant. His snow-white coat glowed like silver, and his mane and tail were long and flowing; the latter nearly reached the ground.

"This grand specimen of the best blood of the Arabian desert was sent directly to Master Button by the Sultan of Morocco as a mark of his high estimation of the daring hardihood of the intrepid young rider," said the ringmaster as he entered the ring.

"That's so," said Sam Lathrop, following close behind him. "I was there and seed it myself."

"Nonsense," replied Nathan; "you never were in Morocco in your life."

"Yes, I was," replied the clown, stoutly.

"When?"

"When I was about so old," replied Sam, reaching down to his knees and waving his hand to and fro, as he winked at the audience; "in Morocco shoes; mother put me in 'em. Didn't they squeak, though?"

And as the audience shouted with delight, the veteran clown leaped merrily away to avoid the swishing lash.

"Please ask Master Button to step this way," said Mr. Nathan, suavely.

"I don't care a button if I do," replied Sam.

"Master Button will please step this way."

And again our hero bounded into the arena.

This time he was dressed in a flesh-colored suit of tights and ruby trunks glittering with spangles, which set off his sturdy little form to perfection. His curly hair was bound back from a well-shaped forehead by a ruby satin ribbon upon which glistened a shining star, and as he bowed and kissed his hand to the applauding auditors, the heart of many a country beauty beat with ardent emotion.

Billy had been in Jamaica before, and had made himself an especial favorite among the ladies.

"Foot it, young fellow!" said Sam, elevating our hero to the bare back of the restless horse, who stood pawing the sawdust ring with his fore feet as he champed his bit as if eager to be away over the course.

"Let go!" shouted Billy, as the attendant loosened his grasp upon the reins, and away flew the magnificent animal like an arrow.

Around and around the ring he sped.

At one instant our hero was lying forward on the horse's neck with legs outspread upon his loins and haunch, while he kissed his hands playfully to the right and left, to the delighted spectators.

And then he would throw himself hastily around amid many a sharp scream from the timid lady admirers, and lying back downward upon the bare haunch, would cast his legs upward in the air with a shout that increased the mad career of the frantic steed, as if he'd heard the deadly war-whoop of a Comanche Indian.

Then he'd leap lightly to his feet, and with one foot between the ears of the horse, the other stretched as far backwards as the length of his limbs permitted, he'd cheer the horse onward with persuasive voice.

It was termed: "A Break Neck, Bareback Hurdle Act," that Billy was riding, and he seemed doing it in dead earnest, for many of the auditors expected to see him break his neck every instant, so recklessly was he carrying out the act.

But finally the first portion of the intrepid performance was accomplished, and the horse came to a stop as Billy patted his neck, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"What can I do for you now?" inquired the clown, as he came up to the horse's side at the command of the ringmaster. "Say, who's that eying you so closely yonder?" he demanded, aside, as he pretended to be examining the horse's bridle.

"Where?" demanded Billy, looking around among the sea of heads.

"That black-muzzled-looking chap standing by the ring-pole," replied the clown.

"By gumps!" answered Billy, "that's Starbuck Hanlon, the sea lubber we snaked the shirts from to use as tights, and there's Ed himself; what can they be doing here?"



"Blowed if I know," replied Sam, snappishly; "no good, I'll be bound, hang the whole kit and caboodle of 'em!"

Just then the music struck up, and the attendants having entered and adjusted the hurdles, Billy dashed away to complete the hazardous act.

## CHAPTER VII.

## NEARLY A TUMBLE.

On sped the flying horse with wide distended nostrils, with eyes flashing fire, his quivering flanks one mass of foaming lather.

Both hurdles were leaped with a will by both horse and man, time and again, and then came the crowning effort, where Billy Button was to stand erect upon the back of the flying steed as he careered the ring at full speed, leaping each hurdle in turn without falling or missing his position.

The first hurdle was reached and leaped without a miss by both horse and rider, amid the breathless attention of the spectators.

Then came the second.

The horse was approaching it rapidly when one of his fore feet slipped, and stumbling forward, he came down upon both knees, touching each in rapid succession, but quickly recovering his position he bounded the hurdle at a leap.

So sudden was the instantaneous pause that Billy was nearly thrown from the horse.

He had no reins at the time.

He was standing with nothing to guard him upon the barebacked horse.

But scarcely had the animal plunged forward with a downward move, when Billy threw himself flat on his back, and grasping the loins and flank with his legs and arms, he broke and prevented a fall that might possibly have cost him his life.

And thus he took the second hurdle.

In an instant two ring attendants darted to the horse's head and brought him to a standstill.

"Are you hurt, Bill?" inquired Lathrop, hastening to his side.

"No," replied Billy, with a smile, as he panted to regain his breath, "but it was a pretty rough shake up notwithstanding. I thought I was a goner."

"You bet. Take it easy the next turn."

"You bet!" was the cheerful rejoinder.

Meanwhile, the audience had also taken breath, and the whole tent resounded with applause. And both horse and rider started again.

Away they went!

Again the first hurdle was successfully passed, and again they approached the second.

"Go it, young feller!" shouted an excited voice from the audience. "Go it! I'll bet on you every time!"

"Shut up, you cussed fool!" replied another.

"Who do ye call a fool?"

"You!"

Plug!

The blow struck home.

And just as the horse was preparing to leap the hurdle a half inebriated country boy, staggered by the force of the ruffianly blow, tumbled backward directly beneath his feet. Billy Button saw the boy's danger in a minute.

He whistled to his steed, and planted his foot firmly on its flank. The horse turned and darted toward the center of the ring as Billy flung himself forward, clasping his legs firmly around the animal's neck, and then stooping down, caught up the prostrate form before the hind feet had time to reach it.

The deed of heroism was performed in an instant.

Not a hand save that of Billy Button had been stretched forth to save the poor lad from instantaneous death.

Even the circus employees, usually accustomed to act on the spur of a moment, were held spell-bound by the sudden emergency.

But as soon as the noble horse came to a halt, as he did immediately at the command of his young owner, such a heartfelt burst of applause as shook that canvas had scarcely, if ever, been heard within the bounds of a circus before.

Strong men leaped into the ring to release the half dazed boy from the hands of our hero.

Ladies screamed and fainted.

For a few moments a scene of the wildest confusion ensued.

And during the interval the ruffianly assailant had managed to make his escape.

Once more Billy brought his horse to place to complete the act.

But the audience would not permit him to do so.

"No—no!" was the shout on every hand.

And with blushing features our hero retired, amid a burst of tumultuous applause.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE STORY OF THE IRON CHEST.

THE afternoon performance had concluded, and Billy was walking leisurely toward the hotel, when some one tapped him upon the shoulder.

He turned quickly and found himself face to face with his old playfellow, Ed Hanlon, of our boys' circus reminiscence.

"Hallo, Bill, old boy, put it there for old rocks' sake. I haven't seen you for a dog's age."

"Well, these are dog days, but I never say die," replied Billy, with a hearty grip in return to the grasp of his old chum.

"Where have you been all the time?" inquired Ed, eagerly, as he drew up alongside of Billy and walked along.

"It's a long story, but I'll tell it to you when we're out of earshot if you've a mind to listen," replied Billy, for the reader will doubtless by this time recognize in Billy Button the reckless, devil-may-care Beelzebub of the prologue. "Come along this way upon the hill, and we'll take a lop down on the grass and I'll spin the yarn."

"Bully for you, Beel, you're a trump," replied Ed, giving him a hearty slap on the back; "let's have a couple of cigars and then we'll trot along."

"No half Spanish this time," laughed Billy, good-naturedly, as they entered a shop and invested in a couple of Principes, and then they passed up Fulton street to Union Hall and went upon the hill, taking a seat under one of the oaks and watching the rosy sunset as old Sol sought his couch in the west.

"Let's see," asked Billy, dreamily, as he puffed a cloud of smoke from his nostrils, "how old are you now, Ed?"

"Going on twenty, cully. I was just on twelve when Star tumbled to the shirt racket and busted the show," answered Ed, smiling at the old time memory.

"Just so," resumed Billy, nodding his head; "those were high-daddy old times, wasn't they, Ed?"

"Just hefty."

"Bet your life," continued Billy. "I was just about ten, and ten and eight makes eighteen."

"Did when I went to school," said Ed.

"Well, I never had much schollarin, 'cept what I picked up," continued Billy; "but I've got some experience by hard knocks. Say, did yer mother ever find her diamonds?"

"No."

"Believes I stole 'em yet, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Ed, hesitatingly.

"Do you?"

"No, I never did—'pon my life!"

"Thank you. I'd swear it on a stack of Bibles. So they never turned up?"

"No; mother kind of gave the thing up after they tried you and couldn't make a case against you. I guess she's let it drop altogether."

"Well, I'm glad of it. It might hurt my character. But some folks don't consider that a circus chap's got any of that commodity about him."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, and you know it, too," replied Billy; "but that's got nothing to do with my story, so I'll spit it out."

"You know the day or so after mother died," and the boy shuddered as he remembered the terrible scenes which could never be obliterated from his memory. "Detective Janton got on my trail and commenced to run me down?"

"Well, the skunk's been on my track more or less ever since, but he can't get the drop on me worth a cent. He came to the show after the afternoon performance, and old Sam gave him a dressing fer playing too much chin-music."

"I wonder where that phrase came from?" said Ed, musingly.

"Don't know," replied Billy, "unless it came from old Bobby Williams' playing on his cheeks this fashion."

And drawing his cheeks with a peculiarly

comical smirk of the mouth, Billy rattled off an air on his cheeks and chin in a fashion that might have done credit to the best xylophone player in existence.

Ed laughed heartily at the performance.

"You beat the deck, Beel," he said.

"I always did," replied our hero, in a dry, humorous manner, that seemed strongly like old Cale Weeks, at that time the prominent caterer of Jamaica.

And well the writer remembers the choice viands which the old man served up with the assistance of his genial, fat-featured and robust-framed good wife.

"Well," continued Billy, resuming his story, "the next day I was snapped up and brought before Judge Talmadge, but he couldn't find nothing ag'in' me, an' so he dismissed the case. But Janton, the blamed sucker, stuck to me like a leech. I believe he'd draw blood from a turnip if he got a chance. But Sam Lathrop, God bless the old man! stuck to me like a brick through thick and thin. He put me in training with Levi J. North, who taught me to ride, and I think he made quite a success of the job."

"I should think so," interrupted Ed, "from the brave act you did this afternoon."

"Yum—yum!" replied Billy; "and I'm mighty glad I saved that boy. It's a wonder that Selim didn't smash him to smithereens with his hoofs. There's no one can go nigh him out of the ring except me and the groom."

"Is he so fiery?" asked Ed.

"Fiery? He's a perfect devil in harness and no mistake. Well, as soon as I'd got discharged by the judge, I went back to the old rookery in Rotten Row to get mother's traps together, and there I got a tumble that I'm afraid I'll never be able to get over."

"Why, I never heard that you were hurt," said Ed, anxiously.

"I didn't mean it in that way, Ed," replied Billy. "You see, mother had a small, iron-bound chest that she always kept carefully locked, and never would let any one look into under any circumstances. When the coroner came to view mother, after she was brought up from the street, he sealed everything up and locked the door. Well, when all was over, and Judge Talmadge had let me go, I went to the coroner, and he let me have the key, so that I could get the chest and whatever else remained. I went to the old room, and Lord bless you, Ed! how gloomy and lonely it looked in its squalid misery. I sat down and had a hearty cry, for notwithstanding that mother had never been much of a mother to me, and treated me more like a dog than a human, nature would out, and I loved her, notwithstanding the hard knocks she gave me; and I shall always believe that she was my mother, no matter if she did deny it the very moment before she died."

"Is that so?" asked Ed, in evident surprise.

"Yes—didn't you never hear that before?"

"I can't remember that I ever did."

"Well, it's so."

And in a few words Billy described the terrible scene in the garret of the old rookery, and repeated the dying words.

"Well!" said Ed, evidently greatly interested.

"Well, when I went to look for the chest after I'd had my cry out, it was clean gone, and nothing was left to tell where it was gone, except a piece of a man's coat-tail, which I found clinging to the rickety window-blind on the outside of the window, which was wide open, as it had been since mother died."

"This is very strange," said Ed.

"Just so; so Sam thought, as well as myself, and so did some of the other boys to whom I told the story; and they all allowed that some scamp must have entered the room over the roof and stolen the chest to obtain some papers or valuables which it evidently contained."

"Maybe they concerned you, Beel?" ejaculated Ed.

"Possibly," retorted our hero; "but be that as it may, neither the chest nor the thief have ever been found, and I am beginning to despair of ever discovering either."

"Quite a romance."

"Yes," replied Billy. "Well, that's all I've got to tell you. Here is a piece of the coat," and as he spoke he took a piece of rough checked cheviot goods from his pocket. It had evidently been torn by catching on a nail or some other object while the thief



was escaping from the apartment of the dead woman.

Both boys examined it closely.

"That is the only clue I hold to discover the rascal who stole mother's box," said Billy, earnestly, "and I'm afraid it's a pretty tough case to ferret out. But if I ever manage to get on his track, I'll run him down, or my nickname of Beelzebub stands for no good!"

"And I'll help you, my boy," said Ed, grasping our hero's hand with a vim; "I'll be of age in a year, and if money will help, you shall not want it!"

"Thank you, Ed, thank you," replied Billy, returning the friendly grasp; "I'm making a pretty good thing as it is, but if I require your aid, I shan't fail to call on you."

"Don't, and you'll find I won't go back on you if you do."

"Well, that's all," said Billy, wrapping up the piece of cloth in its covering of oiled silk and restoring it to his pocket; "and now I must go to Remsen's and get some supper before I go back to the tent."

Both boys arose as he spoke, and sauntered leisurely away toward the village.

The lengthening shadows were creeping on apace, and twilight was gathering around them.

As they disappeared, the head of a man partially arose from behind a clump of alder bushes close beside where they had been sitting.

The features of the man wore a troubled look, and his wicked eyes glittered with an evil expression as he glowered savagely after the boys.

"I must have that piece of cloth at all hazards," he hissed, through his set teeth, as he shook his fist after them; "it may be the means of playing the very devil with my plans if I don't. Look out for yourself, Master Will Westlake, you haven't got rid of Janton, the detective, yet!"

And creeping from his place of concealment, he followed the boys with all the caution of a sleuth-hound.

He had scarcely disappeared, when another head popped up from an adjoining clump of bushes.

It was that of a boy of some eighteen years of age.

The features were bloated and swollen, and the eyes denoted that he had recently awakened from a drunken sleep.

"So!" said the boy, half to himself, "you black-muzzled son-of-a-gun you've got somethin' against Billy Button, have you? You're on his track, are you? Maybe he'll be glad to know it. I guess not. Well, he shall—he saved my life this afternoon and I'll see if I can't do him a slight service in return. Cussed if I don't believe you're the miserable skunk who give me that plug in the snoot."

And with these words the young fellow crept out from the bushes and followed the trail of the detective.

Who was this boy?

He was David Wright, whom Billy Button had saved from the heels of Selim.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A NEW SORT OF ANGEL.

HAVING finished supper at Jim Remsen's, which was first-class (Jim always does the honors in style to the show folks), Billy and Ed started toward the circus.

It was nearly half-past seven, and as they were passing one of the houses, a few rods below Remsen's, Ed stopped and uttered a cry of dismay.

"What's up?" demanded Billy, turning toward his companion.

"Look here!" shouted Ed, as his face turned pale with fright, "that child will fall and break its neck."

He was pointing, as he spoke, to the cornice of a small porch that covered the front door of the handsome cottage which stood just back from the street.

Billy looked hastily up in the indicated direction, and saw that a lovely little girl of apparently four years old was reaching her plump arms eagerly out over the edge of the porch, and in one of the chubby fists was closely clasped a newly-plucked bunch of roses, carnations and pansies.

"I've waiting for papa," she said, smiling sweetly as the two boys paused, rooted to the spot, scarcely able to stir; "see, there he comes, just dot home by de cars—he'd 'em whistle, and mother wouldn't let me go to

meet papa 'lone, so I comed right out here to see him the first, 'corse I did."

"My God! my child will be killed!"

A shriek of intense agony accompanied the words, as the half-frantic mother appeared at the open window, attempting to get out to rescue her child.

"For Heaven's sake, Jennie, don't attempt to go on the shed, it is not safe; 'twill fall and kill you both!" shouted another voice.

It was the half-distracted father, who had just arrived in time to witness the deadly peril of his child.

"But Maria—Maria!" shouted the mother, wringing her hands distractedly, as she stood, undecided what to do.

"Stay where you are, my child!" shouted the father, with a forced voice denying the deadly pallor of his countenance; "stay where you are till papa gets a ladder to take you down."

"Come in, Maria; come in!" pleaded the white-faced mother, extending her hands imploringly towards the child.

"No, I've going to jump down to papa; it's pretty high, but I dess I can do it the way they do in the circus."

Again the mother started to get through the window, as the child stood up upon the edge of the trembling roof to make the leap.

The father attempted to open the gate as he shouted to his wife to stop, but it resisted his utmost efforts.

The cold beads of perspiration darted to his forehead as he attempted to climb it, expecting to see his child dashed to pieces at his feet, without his being able to attempt her rescue.

He was on the top of the gate, he was climbing over, and as he did so he heard another blood-curdling shriek from his wife.

He looked up, his brain reeled, he came near losing his balance and falling himself, for in that second of intensified agony he saw a white fluttering object darting through the air with lightning rapidity, and knew that his darling had taken the deadly leap.

But recovering himself with an immense effort, the father leaped to the gravel walk.

Meanwhile, both Ed and our hero had also recognized the perilous position of the child, and as she started to jump, while the father was vainly striving to open the gate, Billy caught the top bar of the fence, and turning a lofty handspring landed on his feet.

Away he ran like a deer.

He had not an instant to spare, for as he reached the piazza steps the little form came bounding down with the velocity of an arrow.

He heard the mother scream, and shouted re-assuringly to her as he held up his hands.

Down came the child, but before her tiny feet had time to touch the stone walk leading from the house to the gate, our hero had caught her stoutly beneath the arms, and with a lithe, upward leap broke the momentum of her fall.

And the next moment the breathless father, whose heart was almost bursting from his bosom, was clasping his darling safe and uninjured within his arms.

"It was just jolly, wasn't it, papa? And he caught me real nice, didn't he?"

"My poor darling," muttered the father, clasping her closer at the question, "it was God's mercy that sent the boy to your rescue."

"He was an angel!" reiterated the relieved mother, who reached them just in time to overhear the last words.

"But where is he gone?"

"The boy that caught me?" asked the child.

"Yes," replied both parents in a breath, turning to look for the rescuer of their child.

"Why, he just turned head over heels over that fence, same as he did before he caught me," replied the child, laughing merrily at the antics of our hero.

The father hastened to the gate and looked over, and turning the corner of the street leading toward the circus, he saw Ed and Billy disappearing on a dead run.

## CHAPTER X.

### BILLY BUTTON'S RIDE TO BRENTFORD.

OWING to the delay attendant on the gallant rescue of the child, it was nearly time for the show to commence when the two boys reached the tent.

"Come around behind?" asked Billy, as they did so.

"Guess not; rather see you from the front," answered Ed, "but I'll see you after it's over; what time d'ye pull up stakes?"

"About half-past eleven," said Billy. "Pell's serenaders take the big tent for an hour or so after we're done, and then the ring and tent hands get to work and make short work of it. But I must get in—there goes the first music, and I'm in just after the entree."

"Well, so long!"

And the two friends separated until later in the evening.

"Say, Beel, come here," said Sam Lathrop, as Billy passed through the flaps of the dressing tent, "I want to speak to you."

"What's up, Sam?" asked Billy, anxiously; "you look as glum as one of the funny mules on half fodder; any one sick or dead?"

"No, but I feel concernedly bothered, nevertheless; you know who that was that I pointed out this afternoon?"

And the old clown took a capacious chew of tobacco as he asked the question.

"Yes, I told you it was Starbuck Hanlon, Sam; I saw his brother Ed afterward, and we had a long confab about old times."

"Is that so? Well, he ain't the only one I'm consarned about—there's another nigger in the fence, and I'm afeard there's some devilment afoot."

"What?" asked Bill, somewhat surprised.

"Janton's round again," answered Sam, "and he and Starbuck have been buzzing closer'n bugs in a rug for the last hour, although they didn't pear to know that they were spotted. They've been around to Squire Snediker's, and I had to leave them there to tend to biz; but I left some one on their tracks, bet your boots."

Billy uttered a troubled whistle.

"That's bad," he said; "I wonder what's their lay now?"

"Can't imagine," replied Sam, "but we must keep our off eye skinned for odd tricks—look sharp."

"All right, old man, I'll keep my eyes peeled," answered Billy, as he hastened away to dress.

The performance passed off without the slightest drag or interruption, and concluded with the famous trick act of Billy Button's ride to Brentford.

This act was ridden without announcement.

The old white horse was led into the ring.

He was a sedate-looking old plug, and from his plain, quiet appearance did not appear to have a bit of go in him.

"I say, mister," said Sam Lathrop, eying the horse carefully, "putty good horse that, eh?"

"The best in the world, sir," answered the ringmaster. "Made the best time on record, two sixty-nine."

"Two hours and sixty minutes a mile, I guess," replied the clown.

"What's that?"

"Good time ter smile, I guess," put in Sam.

"I never smile, sir!" said Nathans, angrily.

"I thought so, when Jim Remsen asked you to pony up for them drinks you hung up the last time you were here—but if that animal's all sound, safe and steady in his gait, I don't mind trying a mount myself."

As he spoke Sam started leisurely toward the horse.

But scarcely had he gone ten steps when a short, squat specimen of a dusty-looking old country farmer staggered over the edge of the ring, and making a few useless efforts to sustain his equilibrium, reeled, and fell directly beneath the old horse's fore and hind legs.

Kick.

Out went one of the hind legs, and the howl that followed proved that the hoof had told home on a tender portion of the old man's anatomy.

"Great snakes!" roared the injured party, as Sam seized him by the feet, and drew him face downward toward the center of the ring, "what in the land sakes do yer mean treating an old man in that manner for?"

"Treating ye to a touch of free soil," responded Sam, good-humoredly; "don't you know better'n ter go poking your miserable carkis 'tween a horse's legs in that fashion? Yer worse than a blind mule driver, tacklin' the hind quarters of a religious mule."

"Well, I 'clare to gracious it is a horse," replied the old man, getting on his feet with an effort, and wiping the sawdust and earth from his face and eyes with a ragged, dirty-looking red handkerchief; "busted if I didn't think it was a saw-horse covered with a buffalo robe."



"Never saw a saw-hoss kick before, did you?" asked Sam.

"Can't say I ever did," replied the old man, adjusting an old pair of hooped spectacles upon his nose, as he commenced eying the old horse with a curious expression of cautious investigation.

"Well, you felt it behind, didn't yer?"

"Yum!" replied the injured party, rubbing himself reflectively.

"Jes' so," laughed Sam; "well, what made you come down here, old Mathusalem?"

"That ain't my name," said the old man, innocently, turning toward the speaker; "my name is—my name is Billy Button. I'm a tailor."

"I don't care a button if it is," answered Sam. "Tip us your flipper, and if there's anything I can do for you call on me when you want it, and you will want, every time."

And grasping the outstretched hand as he spoke like a vise, he wrung it again and again as the old man danced and writhed with agony, pleading piteously to be released.

Finally Sam gave the hand a hasty jerk, and letting go his hold, old Billy Button went staggering forward on another voyage of discovery and plunged nose downward, plowing up the sawdust in such a manner that brought down the house with hilarious roars of continuous laughter.

"Columbus landing in America!" shouted the clown, pointing to the prostrate figure.

"Mark how he stoops to kiss the sacred soil."

And then, as the laughter subsided, he said again:

"Come here, old man, and I'll pick you up."

By this time old Billy's mad was up, and he was up also, going for Sam with his cane like a good fellow, but the clown evaded him with equal celerity, and finally the old fellow had to stop to breathe.

"I say," said he, as soon as he could speak, "I don't want no more fooling, do you mind? I come down here to get a horse, and I mean to do it."

"Well, that's all right," replied Sam.

"Will you take it now or wait until you get it?"

"Hold up," said the ringmaster, interrupting at this point; "enough of this—I trust you will pardon our friend's eccentricities; it is only a harmless way he has of displaying his pleasantries."

"Well, he's got a cussed rough way of displaying 'em," replied the old man, dusting off his clothes with his dilapidated wipe; "but if you're the owner of this 'ere stable, and have got a quiet, gentle, docile animal, who don't go too fast and is warranted not to bite, kick, crib, bolt, shy, or run away, I don't mind if I hire him."

"Well," replied Nathans, "your demands are somewhat exorbitant, but I don't mind accommodating a gent like you; what do you say to that for a specimen of horseflesh—answer all requirements?"

"He kicks, don't he?" demanded Billy, somewhat dubiously.

"Nary a kick," replied Sam, winking at the audience with a quizzical grin which brought down the house.

"No," answered the ringmaster, "I can certify that he will answer your purpose to a charm."

"You don't say?" asked Billy; "well, what do you want for him one day?"

"Let's see," said Nathans, thoughtfully; "well, you'll have to deposit fifty dollars, to be forfeited in case of injury; in case you return him before six P. M. to-morrow, in good condition, I'll return you forty dollars; I don't want to be hard on you, you know."

"Ain't that pretty steep?" inquired Billy, scratching his head.

"No, sir—cheap as dirt."

"Well, I don't mind if I do; couldn't knock off a fiver, eh?"

"Nary a red," answered Nathans.

"Well," sighed the old man, and withdrawing a moth-eaten specimen of a leather pocket-book from an inner pocket, and unwinding a piece of red tape nearly ten yards long from it, he selected the money and handed it to the ringmaster.

"Step this way and I'll give you a lift," said Sam, beckoning to the old man.

On reaching the horse, the clown placed Billy's hands on the pommel of the saddle, and bidding him hold tight, seized him by the leg, and tossed him completely over the horse, where he came down in a heap on all

fours, to the intense delight of the roaring spectators.

"Where on earth are ye?" demanded Sam, examining the horse's back with well-feigned surprise, as he looked up in search of the fallen tailor.

"Here!" ejaculated Billy, with a groan, as he regained his feet with a desperate effort.

"Why didn't you hold on?" demanded Sam; "try it again," and once more he essayed to mount the old man.

This time he succeeded to a charm, but Billy was seated with his face to the tail.

"Galang!"

Sam hit the horse a sharp blow on the haunch, and he started with a jump.

Billy was quite unprepared for the sudden start, and as the horse sprang forward, he plunged forward in the opposite direction, catching hold of the horse's tail in his headlong descent.

The sudden jerk and impetus of the horse, connected with the stout hold that Billy retained on the tail, caused him to turn a complete somersault, landing him plump on his back amid the sawdust, where he went thumping and bumping about in tow of the horse in an excessively comical manner.

"Whoa—whoa!" he cried, as the horse tore around the ring again and again to the intense delight of the spectators, until he was finally brought to a stop by two of the attendants, and then Billy was again assisted to mount in the proper manner.

"I thought you said he wouldn't run away?" he asked of the ringmaster, as soon as he had gained breath.

"Neither he would, if you hadn't got on the wrong side before."

"Never was on before," retorted Button; "never rode a horse before in my life."

"Well, you rode him behind, then," laughed Sam; "blowed if I ever see such a queer guy in all my born days."

"Say, I want to understand something about this, fellers," said Billy, anxiously; "what do you call these things?" pointing to the horse's ears.

"His ears."

"Blowed if I didn't think they was to steer by. What's this?" taking hold of the tail.

"The horse's tail."

"Umph! thought it was the rudder; how does she go, anyway?"

"Why, you put your feet in here," said Sam, placing Button's shoes in the stirrups, "and take the reins in your hands thus," suiting the action to the word, and explaining the method of driving, "and away you go!"

Another slap started the horse at a sharp gait, and away went the old man, exhibiting the most curious antics imaginable.

Now he was lying forward, grasping the horse's neck for dear life, then he was down on one side clinging to the pommel of the saddle to prevent a fall; then shifting with a lurch, his knees were clutching the saddle, while his hands grasped the bridle as he madly dashed on, shouting to be saved from death.

Then he would tumble back to the horse's haunch, when in a second the saddle girths snapped and the saddle fell to the ring, whence it was conveyed by an attendant, leaving the miserable tailor to the merciless caprices of a maddened, barebacked horse.

By this time many of the audience, numerous ladies and children, and not a few stout-hearted men, began to manifest symptoms of alarm, for the old man seemed to be growing weaker and more feeble every instant.

He was crying loudly at the top of his voice for them to stop the horse, when suddenly the unfeeling clown seized the whip from the ringmaster's hand and snapped it briskly at the horse's heels, the animal bounding away like the wind.

Hisses of shame and cries of terror ensued, but as the sounds increased the old man leaped lightly to his feet and began tearing off his clothes; off came his shoes and were thrown into the center of the ring, being caught by an attendant; hat, coat, spectacles and wig followed, and then, with a sudden movement of his hands, a lightning change was effected, and the poor old form of Billy Button, the Tailor of Brentford, appeared as Billy Button, the Boy Champion Bareback Rider, in his charming impersonation of "The Genius of America Protecting the Rights of Freemen."

Cheer after cheer resounded throughout the tent as the rapid change took place, and as

our hero leaped lightly from his horse and bowed to the audience, every person present seemed vying with their neighbor as to whom should give Billy Button the highest honors.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A SHARP TRICK.

BILLY had scarcely bowed his thanks in return to the repeated applause of the delighted audience, and retired to the dressing tent to remove his dress for his everyday clothes, when one of the grooms came to him and said that a boy at the entrance wished to see him.

"What's the name?" asked Billy.

"Said you wouldn't know it, but you'd know him and be mighty glad to see him."

"Tell him to come in," said Billy. "I'll be dressed in a minute," and he went into one of the dressing tents for that purpose.

Presently he returned, dressed in his everyday garb.

"Well, what do you want, young fellow?" he asked, approaching the boy, who was awaiting him near the rear of the wagon. "Halloo! ain't you the chap that I pulled from beneath my horse's feet this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir; and you saved my life, though the folks 'round here say it don't mount to much, nohow."

"Why so?"

"Well, you see, I drink so that they hate me like pizon," replied the young fellow, half ashamed to make the admission.

"Funny, that, for Jamaica," said Billy, dryly; "why don't you brace up?"

"Don't believe I could."

"Never tried, did you?"

"I don't believe I did."

"Well, you better, before you say you can't; that's a word only fit for hypocrites, and such like kidney. What do you do for a living?"

"I job around the stables, and do chores whenever I can get them."

"Take it out in rum, hey?"

The young man hung his head abashed.

"Well, how would you like to make a man of yourself?" demanded Billy, eying him sharply.

"How?" replied the boy, eagerly, looking up.

"Join the show."

"They wouldn't have me. I tried."

"Never mind that," answered Billy, reassuringly; "put your hand there that you'll shut off drink, and I'll give you a show—and mind you, it'll be your own fault if you take a tumble again."

"God bless you, sir," replied the boy, grasping Billy's hand with emotion, as the tears started from his eyes. "You've put new life into me!"

"That's all right; don't make a noodle of yourself; be a man, and let the world see it. Now what do you want of me?"

"I want to thank you for saving my life this afternoon," replied the boy. "I was too drunk to do so then; and again, I wanted to tell you something that concerns you desperately."

"What's that?"

"There's two chaps from York who're hunting you up. One of 'em a detective, I imagine."

"Oh, if that's all, I know it," replied Billy, nonchalantly lighting a segar.

"Well, that ain't all," responded the other; "they've got out a warrant for you, and they mean to serve it to-night."

Billy whistled.

"How do you know this?" he asked.

"Well, I know a thing or two, notwithstanding what folks say," replied the boy; "and while you and your city friend was talkin' up on Union Hall street on the hill, I was sleepin' off my booze. I chanced to wake up just as you got up, and I knowed you, notwithstanding your everyday dress. Well, I see this detective, whose name is Janton, by the way, watchin' you, although he didn't see me. Well, after you got up to go, I heard him say something about getting a piece of cloth from you, and that he was on your track, and then I smelt a mouse; so I just took him in tow, and followed him up until I saw him talking with another city chap, whom he called Star."

Billy nodded his head comprehensively.

"Well, after a long talk, they agreed that they must get a warrant and snap you up; and then they went down to Judge Sned



iker's, where they had to wait until he returned from York, and then they got the warrant, for I heard them say so as they came out. They said it was better to wait to serve it until after the performance, so as not to kick up a row, and meanwhile they went to look up the constable to take you in."

"This is a pretty kettle of fish!" ejaculated our hero; "where are they now?"

"Waiting outside till you come out."

"The devil! Say, Sam," hailed Billy to the clown, who at this moment entered the tent, "Janton's got a warrant and is waiting outside to serve it."

"I know it, — him," growled Lathrop, "and they'll do it unless you can get into Kings County before they snap you."

"They might get another one there, and I can't get there without being spotted, either."

"If you could only get to East New York," muttered Sam, thoughtfully.

"Well, what then?"

"Why, Selim's there by this time with the groom, and you could start with him for the Houston Street Ferry, and if you could only get over to Lent's he'd stow you away where the devil wouldn't find you."

"That's so!"

"I tell you he's inside and I will see him."

The voice was that of Janton, the detective. He was endeavoring to shove himself into the tent.

"What shall we do?" demanded Billy, somewhat nervously; "we'll have to fight it out, I reckon."

"Nary a time," replied the boy, who had been standing quietly beside them taking it all in; "you can get to East New York and no mistake."

"How?" demanded both Sam and Billy in a breath.

"Come this way."

Stooping down, the speaker lifted up the flap of the tent and leaped through, followed by Sam and Billy.

The boy pointed toward the railroad.

And the three ran rapidly in that direction. On reaching it the boy pointed to a hand-car.

"That'll go nearly fast as a train," he said.

"So it will!" shouted Sam, elatedly; "shove her on the main track. No up trains to-night, are there?"

"Nary a train except the milk, at four to-morrow morning."

"Bully boy!"

By this time the hand-car was on the main track, and leaping on board, Billy and his companion seized the handles.

The crank turned, and she commenced to move. Gradually the motion increased, and in another minute the old clown stood alone waving his adieu as the two boys spun away like a locomotive.

## CHAPTER XII.

"HAD THE DEAD WOOD ON THEM."

As the two boys, accompanied by Sam Lathrop, dove under the flaps of the dressing tent, Janton endeavored to force himself in at the rear entrance, followed by Starbuck Hanlon and the village constable.

"But I tell you he ain't here," reiterated the night watchman, pushing Janton back with a warning shove; "he went out the front way scarcely ten minutes ago."

"It's a lie!" replied Janton, angrily, pushing stoutly ahead; "I saw him over there just now."

"That's a fighting word, cully!" replied the watchman, who was a burly specimen of a backwoodsman hailing from the State of Maine, standing six feet two in his stockings, and the man planted a blow full at the face of the detective.

Janton parried it, and taking in his man at a glance, saw that he meant fight.

"Take it easy, Brock," said he, hauling in his horns somewhat, "we've got a warrant for Billy Westlake, and there's no use in your getting into trouble about it."

"I don't mean to; but I won't take 'a lie,' notwithstandin'. I'm a ring-tail-roarer, and I never funk'd in my born days. But if you've got what yer say let's see the papers."

"That's your ticket," said the constable, flourishing the warrant before the watchman's face, "don't be a fool; and let the law take its course."

"I ain't much of a schollard," replied Hank Brockway, eying the document suspiciously, "but if you say it's all right, I suppose it is—go in, but I tell you I saw him goin' out, and that's the long and short of it."

He gave way, and Janton and his party rushed in the direction of the dressing wagon.

"Seen Billy Button?" he demanded, eagerly, of one of the grooms who chanced to be passing.

The man was a green hand, and not being posted, replied at once:

"Yes, he just went under the edge of the tent."

"I thought so," snapped the detective, and in an instant he was following suit, followed by his companions.

"You darn fool!" shouted Brock, darting towards the astonished groom, and dealing him a blow alongside of the head that caused a thousand stars to dance before his eyes, "you're a blamed pretty faker, you are, to give a pal away in that fashion; get out, you sucker, and if this night's work don't cost you a sit, why my name ain't Hank Brock from Maine, and I ain't a ring-tail-roarer, and never was—I'll report yer to-morrow, sure as yer born."

The bewildered man sprang aside to escape the second blow, and managed to beat a retreat, while the enraged watchman returned to his post at the door, and reprimed his capacious mouth with about a thumb's length of pigtail tobacco.

Meanwhile, on reaching the outside of the tent, the detective stood for a moment, gazing hastily around, as if undecided which direction to take in pursuit of the fugitives, and then, as if to aid him in his search, the moon burst momentarily out through a rift of dark, threatening clouds, and displayed a party of three turning up the railroad track towards the depot.

"That's them!" he shouted, eagerly, pointing toward the disappearing men. "Come along," and the next instant himself and followers were running in the same direction as fast as they could leg it.

But ere they reached the track the moon disappeared again and all around was buried in gloom. It had been clouding up during the night, and heavy drifts of clouds obscured the sky, and from the fitful gusts of wind that resulted, the trees and the sultry nature of the air, it was evident that a heavy thunderstorm was rapidly approaching.

It took scarcely a minute for the pursuers to reach the track, and as they did so they heard a dashing, rattling sound approaching, and had scarcely time to leap from between the rails before a hand-car came dashing by with such a fearful velocity, that, had they remained where they were another instant, they would certainly have been ground to pieces on the spot.

"I wonder what's up?" asked the constable. "I haven't heard of any accident down the track that would require trackmen to fix."

But no one paused to think up an answer, for once again they were all running up the track.

On reaching the depot they met a man coming down the platform bearing a red lantern.

"Seen a party of three running up the track lately, Connolly?" asked the constable, pausing for a second to make the inquiry.

"Nary a one; what's up?" asked the other.

"Hain't got time to explain; saw them comin' this way, though, not three minutes since. What's up down the track that you had to send down a hand-car just now?"

"Hain't sent no hand-car," was the reply of the baggage-master and night watchman, whose name was Connolly.

"Why, I seen a hand-car go by the Jamaica Bay road only a minute since; come cussed near gettin' run over by it, too," explained the constable.

"Blame them pesky boys," said the baggage-master, "they're always meddlin' with them hand-cars; some of 'em'll get run over and killed to death one of these days; there's no use tryin' to watch 'em, and the men are as careless too, for, notwithstandin' that I tell them to lock up the cars, they never do it."

"What's up, constable?" demanded Janton, from up track. "Anything the matter?"

"No," replied the other. "Come back if you hain't seen anything of the game—Where's Harris, Connolly?" The latter to the baggage-master.

"In the office, I guess."

The constable leaped upon the platform at the reply, and began hammering on the depot door.

"What's the matter?" demanded Janton, who had by this time returned, followed by Starbuck.

"Nothing, only that our game has slipped our grip," replied the constable, "and I'm going to try and head them off at East New York."

"How so?" asked the puzzled detective.

"By telegraph; the circus shows there to-morrow," replied the constable, still hammering away on the door; "Westlake's got the dead wood on us."

"How?"

"Gone on to East New York by that hand-car, that's all!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### GETTING A SHOCK.

JANTON brought his hand down on his hip with a savage slap, as he uttered a surprised whistle.

"Is that so?" he asked.

"Yes, and no mistake about it," answered the constable; "but here comes Harris, and if the operator at East New York's in, we'll have Billy Button yet, notwithstanding all his sharpness."

"Who's there?" asked a voice from the inside of the depot, as they ceased speaking.

"Only me, Harris," replied the constable; "open the door. I want to send a message to East New York."

"All right!"

The sound of drawing of bolts and turning of a key followed, and then the door was opened by the ticket agent, who also acted as telegraph operator at that time.

"Anything up?" he asked, as he relocked the door and went into the office to make the call.

"Hain't time to answer," replied the constable, as he listened anxiously to the ticking of the telegraphic instrument that Harris was manipulating.

Presently it stopped, and a brief interval of silence ensued, and then there came a ticking sound in reply.

"It's all right," said Harris, "he's in; what do you wish to send?"

The constable held a hurried conversation with Janton, and then he turned to Harris again.

"Send word to Justice Hamilton," said the constable, "to arrest and hold till my arrival three parties who have stole a hand-car from this station and started for East New York; will come immediately."

"Three what?" asked the astonished operator.

"Never mind, do as I say."

"What names?" demanded Harris.

"One is named William Westlake; he's the one we want. I don't know the names of the other parties."

"You must be more explicit," replied Harris, "otherwise no attention will be paid to the message. Hamilton knows his biz."

"Tell him that Westlake belongs to Sands & Nathans' Circus, which opens at East New York to-morrow afternoon. He is known as Billy Button, the Boy Clown and Bareback Rider; we have a warrant for his arrest on a charge of stealing a pair of diamond ear-rings from Mrs. Sarah Hanlon of No. —, Ninth street, New York."

"Write it out," said Harris, who seemed completely in a fog. "I can't make head nor tail of it."

Janton uttered a smothered curse, and seizing a paper and pencil, wrote the message.

"That's it," said he, handing it to Harris. "Now send it as quick as the devil let you; we've lost altogether too much time already."

Harris fell to work with a will; but he had scarcely half completed the message when the instrument failed to work.

"The circuit is cut off, I fear," he said, turning to the officers. "I can do no more."

"Try it again," said the detective, earnestly.

"I don't believe it will be of any use," said Harris. "There is a heavy thunderstorm raging below; I can tell it by the working of the wires, and it is extremely dangerous to work under such circumstances. I believe East New York has shut off the circuit."

"Try it again," said Starbuck Hanlon.

Harris placed his hand upon the instrument.

But scarce had he done so when he uttered a howl of pain and reeled across the office as if he had been shot.



"My God!" he cried, "it is a wonder that I was not killed. I never experienced such a shock in all my life!"

And he wrung his hands with anguish as he spoke.

"I feel as if I had been stricken by a thunderbolt!"

"Try it again!" ejaculated Janton and Hanlon, in a breath.

"I'll see you hanged first!" shouted Harris. "I'm half killed already; and if you want to telegraph, do it yourself."

Starbuck and his companions raged and fumed, swore and entreated, but Harris positively refused to make another attempt, and for a brief interval the conspirators stood stupidly facing each other, earnestly considering the next best move to make.

"I'd give a hundred dollars to catch that young scamp!" shouted Hanlon, passionately; "and I've got the money to do it."

He produced a plethoric pocket-book as he spoke.

Conolly's eyes glistened greedily at the sight.

"Tip us a fiver and it's done," he said.

"How?" demanded Hanlon, eying him suspiciously.

"There's an engine fired up that's to go down at twelve," replied the baggage-master, "and I calculate if you were to give the engineer half of what you named, he'd be off in a jiffy. It's the 'Moses Maynard,' and she's rid 'tween Jamaica an' Bedford time and again in nine minutes without a stop, and eight cars behind her."

"Done!" ejaculated Hanlon, "get the engineer and we'll put a test to the Maynard's speed."

He handed the five dollars to Conolly as he spoke, and pocketing the bill with a satisfied grin, the baggage-master quitted the office.

Nearly ten minutes passed, during which Starbuck and his companions paced the office fuming with impatience, and then Conolly returned.

"It's all right," he said, "he'll take you for twenty-five dollars, but it's raining awful."

"I don't care if it's a second edition of the deluge, as long as we catch our man," said Starbuck, as he stepped out on the platform.

"This way," said Conolly, as he pointed toward the opposite track where the engine stood puffing and blowing ready for the start.

The three men buttoned their coats closely up to their chins and started out in the pouring rain, which was now coming down in torrents.

As they did so, a man looked eagerly around the edge of the depot.

"The devil stop you," he muttered, "and God help poor Beel!"

"It was Sam Lathrop who spoke; he had overheard the whole interview through the open window of the telegraph office."

And as he withdrew again to his place of concealment, the shrill whistle of the locomotive rang sharply out amid the storm as the ponderous driving wheels commenced to move.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### ON A HAND-CAR.

As Billy Button and Dave Wright turned the crank of the hand-car, and waved their adieus to Sam Lathrop, who stood upon the track wishing them God speed, the car commenced to move with gradually accelerated motion until it was spinning along at the rate of twenty miles an hour.

They could hear the click-click-click of the rails as they sped along, and the boys' hearts beat light within their bosoms, as they realized that they were leaving their enemies behind.

It was nearly seven miles to the outskirts of East New York; on they went; they passed Leffert's avenue and Brigg's station, then Clarenceville and Woodhaven flew quickly by, and then the storm burst upon them with all its violence.

The rain came down like a waterspout, the lightning flashed, and heavy peals of thunder shook the earth and the air around them as they sped along, and still the young adventurers had no thoughts of fear.

They were approaching Union Course,

\* Fact.—The writer has ridden on a train carried by the "Moses Maynard," in 1854 or '55, when she ran the distance, about nine miles, in eight minutes and a half.

when Billy uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Great Jinks!" said he, suddenly, "supposing they were to telegraph!"

"What?" asked Dave, but half comprehending the remark.

"If they should telegraph," shouted our hero, lugubriously, "we might be snapped up before we reach East New York."

"That's so, by gum!" ejaculated Dave, letting go his hold of the handle of the crank.

The sudden movement brought Billy over with a turn and he, too, was forced to release his hold.

The handle struck Dave in the breast as it spun around, and knocked him into the corner of the car, gasping for breath, while Billy had to leap back to avoid a similar mishap.

"What shall we do, Dave?" asked Billy as he recovered himself, and the car commenced to cease its rapid motion, "are you much hurt?"

"No, but it gave me a considerable shake up; what's to be did?"

"I've got it," said Billy, suddenly, as the car came to a stand-still.

"What?"

"Cut the telegraph wires!" replied Billy, cheerfully.

"It can't be did."

"Why not?"

"Bekase they're too high," answered Dave, mournfully, "and ag'in, they're too strong."

"Nonsense," replied Billy, laughing, "don't get in a cast-iron sweat, I'm some on the climb, and these railroad hands usually have tools in the cars, maybe they've left some lying 'round loose."

As he spoke he began fumbling around in the bottom of the car.

Sure enough, the next moment the plucky boy arose, displaying to his demoralized companion a hammer and a cold-chisel.

"Them's the implements," he shouted, reassuringly, as he leaped from the car, and made for the nearest telegraph pole.

He clasped it tightly with his hands and knees and began ascending it with the utmost determination.

But he found that the climbing matter was not as easy as he had imagined, the pole was extremely smooth, and the pouring rain had rendered it as slippery as glass. His hands and knees slipped and slid, and notwithstanding his skill and muscle, before he was half up he felt his strength giving out.

But Billy was as quick witted as he was plucky, and as he was almost giving up the feat as a bad job a sudden idea presented itself, and seizing upon it at once, he hammered home the cold chisel into the hard wood as far above his head as he could reach.

This gave a staunch hold, and raising himself up as far as the stay permitted, he clutched the pole stoutly with his knees and knocked out the chisel.

It was slow progression, but he worked with a will, and finally, by dint of clear grit and perseverance, he reached the top, and with a quick blow of the chisel he severed the wire.

"Eureka!" shouted Billy, as he slid down the pole, giving himself some cruel cuts from the ragged edges as he did so.

"I guess they can't telegraph much now," he shouted with elation as he reached the earth and sprang to the hand-car, "unless they did so before I tumbled to this 'ere racket."

He was right; it was he, not the operator at East New York who had cut off the circuit, and the busy operators at either end of the wires were equally puzzled as to the sudden stoppage in the tell-tale current of electricity.

"Blamed if you ain't as sharp as chain-lightning!" exclaimed Dave Wright, as our hero leaped into the hand-car, and seizing the crank, bade him take hold and go ahead, "you ought ter be the president of the United States."

"None of it if you please," laughed Billy, genially, as the car began to move again. "Play it light, cully, I ain't proud. I'd rather be Billy Button any day of the week, or night either, notwithstanding all the lightning in creation."

As if in answer to the reply, there came a blinding flash of scintillating flame that played around the boys, dazing them until they could scarcely see, accompanied by reports louder than a park of field artillery fired *en masse*; and a ball of lurid fire darted from Heaven, striking the next pole to that from

which the wire had been severed, splintering it thoroughly in two, and carrying it to the earth with a detonating crash.

It was this stroke that caused Harris to exclaim that he had been stricken by a thunderbolt.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### A HEROIC DEED.

"Blamed if that wasn't a slasher!" shouted Dave, as he finished winking from the effects of the electric stroke; "I see it playing along the rails as bright as a hissin' serpent at a fire-works show."

"You bet it did," replied Billy, as he seized the crank, which had dropped from the effects of the stroke, "and it knocked that telegraph pole completely into smithereens. It's cussed lucky that I didn't choose it to operate on, or maybe I might have taken a flying leap, with all the latest electric effects."

Stout-hearted as he was, even genial-hearted Billy shuddered at the idea.

By this time the two boys had got the car in full working order, and it was spinning over the rail at a mad rate, inspired, as it would seem, by the demoniac spirit of the storm that raged around with such ruthless fury.

But the boys, although thoroughly drenched to the skin, paid but little attention to the elemental strife, their main object was to reach East New York, and that as speedily as possible.

And thus, while the rain water streamed from their hats and clothes in miniature rivulets, the perspiration poured down their faces profusely, mingling with the rain, as they arduously worked to accelerate the speed of the humming hand-car.

On she went clattering o'er the rails, making "everything howl around her," as Billy facetiously remarked to his comrade.

She swept by Union Course with the velocity of a swallow; on they sped faster and faster; they were approaching a high embankment, some short distance below Cypress Hills, when a small ray appeared in the far distance glimmering like a star upon the track directly ahead.

"What's that?" demanded Billy, anxiously, of his companion, as he pointed out the light.

Dave turned his head slightly over his shoulder, and looked in the indicated direction.

"I think it's the headlight of a locomotive coming this way," he replied, in an anxious voice.

On sped the hand-car, both boys looking out anxiously amid the darkness at the light.

"Yes," said Dave, finally, "it is the headlight of a locomotive, and it's coming this way like Old Nick. I can see it growing bigger and bigger every moment."

"You're right," murmured Billy, reflectively, as he saw that Dave spoke the truth; "I wonder if they could have telegraphed before I cut the wires?"

"Maybe," replied Dave, as if in answer to the half-uttered thought.

"If that is so," said Billy, "maybe that's a locomotive with a lot of M. P.'s. on board, coming to snap us up."

"The deuce!" ejaculated Dave with a howl.

"What are we going to do about it? That's what's the matter?" demanded Billy, as if he had not noticed his companion's expression of dismay. "Say?"

"I'm stumped," replied Dave; "we'll both be jugged, sure as fate!"

"Better not count your chickens before they're hatched," smiled Billy, good humoredly; for, notwithstanding his own quandary he could not help laughing at his comrade's dismay; "bad news travels fast, and it's time enough to grunt when it fully reaches us. I suppose we'll have to skip the gutter."

"What?"

"Drop the machine, abandon the hand-car, and do the best to reach East New York on foot without being snapped up. If I can only get on the back of Selim once, I'll defy all the cops in New York or Brooklyn to lay hands on me."

"Is that so?" inquired Dave, brightening up somewhat, but the next instant his voice fell again; "but maybe they'll be looking for you at the hotel in East New York, too?"

"That's so," replied Billy, thoughtfully. "I never thought of that."

Dave uttered a cry of delight.



"I've got it," he said, waving his cap in the air, "stop the car and let's get out, I know a place where you can hide safe as a bug in a rug, until to-morrow night, meanwhile you can give me a letter to some of your friends in the circus, and I can take it to them—no one will suspect me, and if they do they can't prove anything ag'in me, and if they snap me up they'll have to let me go again. Meanwhile your friends 'll know where you are and look out that you get safe away till the present trouble blows over."

"That's bully," replied our hero, putting on the brakes of the hand-car, "you're a perfect trump, Dave; and in case you are snapped, I'll see that you get off scot free, and don't you forget it, either."

"That's a go," said Dave, wringing Billy's hand as the car came to a standstill, "now, let's dust lively. The engine is nearly on us. We must get before we are seen."

Sure enough the headlight of the approaching locomotive was beginning to dance along the rails, and illuminate the hand-car with its rays, and the rumble of the wheels were plainly discernible.

"But what are we going to do about the hand-car?" demanded Billy, anxiously.

"Let it alone; it'll take care of itself, won't it?" asked Dave. "What do we care?"

"We ought to get off the track," said Billy, "it might destroy life."

"That's so," replied Dave, "but I don't see how we can do it, it took three of us nip and tuck to put it on, and it's twice as heavy now from the rain."

"I can't help it, I'm going to try," said Billy, determinedly, as he started for the fence and detached a rail.

The spot where the hand-car had rested was directly over the site of the present culvert of the Brooklyn water-works, which runs beneath the Cypress Hills, and the high embankment rendered it an extremely dangerous place for a railroad collision.

This our hero had recognized at a glance and explained as hastily to his comrade, who now seemed equally anxious to prevent the impending catastrophe.

In a moment the two boys had placed the stout oaken rail beneath the hand-car, and exerting their utmost strength, succeeded in tossing it off the track, whence it went bounding over the embankment to the field beneath.

It was a brave and manly act, in which they both risked their lives, for scarcely had they completed the task and leaped aside before a locomotive to which a passenger car was attached came sweeping by like the wind.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

THAT was a mighty close shave, Dave," said Billy, as he saw the train sweeping away like a whirlwind in the distance.

"Yes, siree!" replied Dave, with a sigh; "near took all the breath out of me. But come along. Ain't got no time to lose in case they're lookin' us up. Got to move lively."

He turned toward the side of the embankment as he spoke.

"Halloo! what's up now?" asked Billy, looking anxiously up the track toward Cypress Hill station as the shrill whistle of the locomotive rang out clearly and distinctly on the air.

Dave turned and looked in the same direction.

"I'm sure I can't tell," he replied, and as he spoke an answering whistle came sounding toward them in return.

"By gumps!" ejaculated Dave, "there's a train comin' down, too! I can see the headlight, and from the way the bulgines talked just now they were pretty near a collision."

"Blazes!" retorted Billy; "you don't say!"

"Yes, I do," replied Dave. "But come along; it won't do to stand here. Things are getting hot."

And he seized Billy by the hand as he made the remark and hurried him briskly down the embankment.

They passed sideways down the slippery sand, which gave way and crumbled beneath their feet, as they made their way to the field below; and on reaching the foot of the bank he turned sharply to the right and ran towards East New York.

But he had not passed far before he paused in front of a pile of railroad ties, which had accidentally been tossed over the side of the embankment and ranged in tiers at the foot,

By this time the force of the storm had passed over, and the rain was subsiding.

"Promise me you won't give away what you are about to see," said Dave Wright, pausing and turning inquiringly towards our hero.

"I promise," replied Billy, decidedly.

"Honor bright?"

"You may trust me," answered Billy, proudly; "I'm no slouch, and the word of a circus man is as good as his bond."

"Shake!"

Dave uttered the word, and as he felt the solid grip of Billy Button upon his outstretched hand, he had not the slightest doubt that he would keep his word.

"That's enough," he resumed; "I hadn't the slightest doubt of you in the first place, but I wanted your word, for the old chap that I'm going to introduce to you is one of the queerest old codgers in existence, and if things wasn't as desperate as they are, I shouldn't take you to his den by no manner of means."

And without further parley Dave led the way behind the pile of railroad ties.

"Hist?" he said, anxiously, as he stopped and looked cautiously around, "did you hear anything?"

"No," said Billy, in turn following his lead.

"I heard nothing—only it's getting amazing chilly, I imagine."

Maybe he was somewhat nervous, possibly it was only the preliminary symptoms of an approaching cold that caused him to shiver as he spoke, but he did so nevertheless, and that pretty decisively.

"I guess you're right," said Dave, "I guess it was my imagination—I'm a little shook up myself."

He stooped down, and knocking sharply on one of the logs, uttered a low whistle.

He waited a few moments, but as there came no reply, he repeated the operation.

Another pause ensued, and then Dave arose with an exclamation of disappointment.

"I'm afraid the old man ain't here, after all," he said; "it's too bad."

"What's too bad, and what do you want around here this time of night?"

The interruption and question came so suddenly that it quite took the boys by surprise.

But Dave quickly recovered himself, and turned toward the new comer.

"Blamed if I didn't think you was out, Jethro, but I'm mighty glad you're back, because I want to ask a great favor."

"Oh, it's you, is it, Dave?" asked the other, "and you ain't alone either, unless my eyes deceive me in the darkness."

"You're right," answered Dave; "come this way and I'll tell you all."

He drew his companion aside and for a brief interval both conversed in low tones, and then Dave's friend said, aloud:

"Well, if you say it's all right, I'll take your word for it, but mind you, I hold you personally responsible that he keeps a still tongue in his head."

"I'd stake my life on it," replied Dave, heartily.

"Come this way, then," replied the other.

He stooped down as he spoke, pulling aside a couple of the railroad ties which appeared firmly secured at the lower portion of the pile.

But they gave way readily at his touch and revealed a flooring of boards, which the rain had rendered extremely damp.

But by another move he managed to lift up a trap door and motioned for Dave to descend.

Dave seized Billy's hand and drew him carefully after him.

"Look out you don't fall," he said, steadying him in the descent, "it ain't very fur down, but you might come down too soon, notwithstandin'."

Billy realized that they were descending a rough pair of extemporized steps leading into the bowels of the earth, and as they did so he could hear their strange companion closing the trap behind them.

Billy thought it was one of the most strange and mysterious adventures of his life and had he not felt assured that he was wide awake, he would have been sure that he was dreaming.

Finally they reached the foot of the stairs, and then Billy heard the snapping of a match, and the next instant the rays of a bull's-eye lantern were illuminating the apartment.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### RATHER PUT BACK.

WITH a shrill whistle the Moses Maynard swept out of the Jamaica depot, and as she swept onward, increased her speed until she was spinning over the rails at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

A satisfied smile lit the faces of Janton and his companions, as the fireman opened the blazing furnace to apply more fuel.

"That'll bounce 'er," said the stoker, with a grin, as he closed the door; "now we're off, and don't you forget it."

"It's just jolly," said Starbuck Hanlon; "and if we overhaul our game I'll stand a basket of wine, or anything else at your pleasure. Let her out!"

"She's doing her level best," replied the engineer, "and I daren't test her more."

Away sped the iron monster, scattering fiery hail behind her amid the falling rain, while the fireman sat on the box looking anxiously ahead in the black darkness, in search of any object of danger that might present itself.

Five minutes passed, and the machine was jumping and leaping along the track in a manner that caused every person in the cab to hold tightly on to prevent a sudden tumble.

"She's doing her prettiest," said the fireman, as his eyes danced with elation; "there's Union Course just ahead, and we'll make every picket in the old fence rattle as we spin by. Gosh blame it, how it rains! I'm clean wet to the skin."

He arose to close the window as he spoke, but as he stretched out his hand for that purpose there came a sudden shock as if the engine had struck some heavy object which caused it to bound and jump, tossing the fireman against Janton and the constable, carrying all three to the floor where they lay in a dazed lump, while Starbuck barely avoided a fall by stoutly clutching hold of the other side of the cab.

"Hit something heavy that time," said the engineer, as he leaned out of the cab window and looked back, and at the same moment there came a brilliant flash of lightning, accompanied by a simultaneous peal of thunder.

"One of the telegraph poles struck by lightning," he continued, "must have fallen cross track; wonder we weren't knocked edgeways."

"That accounts for the electric shock that knocked Harris out of time," said Janton, as he arose to his feet.

"That's so," said the constable, as he and the fireman followed Janton's example, "but it's mighty queer we ain't seen anything of that hand-car yet."

"Never you mind," put in the engineer, reassuringly, "we'll overhaul her presently, see if we don't. Halloo! what train's this coming this way?"

The exclamation was caused by the approaching headlight of the locomotive that had so nearly run down the hand-car.

All hands crowded to the front windows of the cab and looked eagerly out, and sure enough, there was the locomotive coming toward them as she whistled down brakes and commenced to shorten speed.

The Maynard responded, and presently both locomotives came to a stand within but a few yards of each other.

"What engine is that?" demanded a voice from the platform of the up train, as it came to a halt.

"The Maynard," responded the engineer.

"Thought you wasn't to come down till midnight? Tried to telegraph at East New York, but the circuit was shut off."

"Who are you?"

"President of the road."

"Blazes!" ejaculated the engineer of the Maynard, who began to fear that his fee would slip through his fingers. "Lay low, boys," he said to the detective and his comrades, "and maybe we can pull through."

"All right," replied Janton. "Get us safe through and you're money's all secure."

"Yes, but I may lose my position for running before time; that's Mr. Morris, president of the road, and you see we've only one track in fit running order now."

"That's all right," replied Janton; "you needn't give neither us nor yourself away. Just ask the engineer of the other train if he's seen anything of a hand-car below here."

"I will," replied the engineer, leaping from the cab and disappearing in the darkness of the other train.



Presently he returned and stated that the engineer of the up train had seen nothing of the hand-car nor its inmates, and that before they could go further they must go back to the switch at Union Course and lay off until the other trains passed.

"That's bad!" ejaculated Hanlon with an oath.

"I know it," replied the engineer, "but I can't help it. I've made things right with the old man about starting before time, but I can't do no more until he's under way again."

And seizing the lever, he reversed the engine, which began backing towards Union Course, where it ran out on the turn-track until the up-train passed.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE HERMIT OF CYPRESS HILLS.

It was a strange ground-mole of an apartment in which Billy Button found himself standing, as the rays of the bull's-eye fell fully upon it, and displayed its contents distinctly to his gaze.

As his eyes became accustomed to the sudden transition from light to darkness, he saw that the room was composed of railroad ties up-ended, with transverse beams, stoutly braced and ingeniously constructed to prevent the caving in of the earth overhead. It was scarcely six feet high and barely permitted the tall figure of its strange occupant to stand in a stooping posture. There was a small mud fire-place arranged in one corner, in which stood a few cooking utensils, a rude couch covered with several warm, gray blankets; a wooden table and several nail kegs, used as stools, served as the scanty furniture, and the floor was strewn with cedar boughs, which served somewhat to protect the feet from the cold contact of the clayey floor.

But the most singular object in the room was the owner himself.

He was a man of apparently fifty years, and might have been more; in fact it would be impossible to determine his exact age, for the heavy, unkempt hair and grizzly beard nearly covered and concealed his wrinkled and grimy features.

His eyes, which were a dark hazel, and deeply set beneath a shaggy pair of eyebrows, bore a wild, scintillating expression that spoke of a mind ill at ease, if not positively bordering on insanity.

He was dressed in a well-worn suit of linsy-woolsey stuff, which was patched and darned until it presented somewhat the appearance of a dessicated map of the world after it had been fully placed together.

His garments were dripping wet, and as he tossed his Kossuth hat upon the table, our hero saw that his brow was high and broad, while the nose was aquiline, and the nostrils full and clearly defined.

But Billy had scarcely time to notice more, for, as the strange man's eyes fell upon our hero's face, they lit suddenly up with a wild maniacal glare, and he started backward, with his left hand pressed closely over his heart, grasping the table with his right to prevent himself from falling to the floor.

"Merciful powers!" he groaned, as he trembled visibly and cold beads of perspiration sprang out on his forehead, and his eyes moved uneasily to and fro with a frightened expression; "that face—that face! must it forever haunt me like a hideous nightmare—sleeping or waking, it is always before me, sometimes as vivid and distinct as the noon-day sun, at others like a dreamy vision—ah! at those moments she must have forgotten, amid the bright future, the heinous wrong I did her. God forgive me! God forgive! how bitterly have I suffered for it; will it, can it ever be atoned?"

And with a deep, shivering sigh the miserable man sank down upon his knees by his wretched bed, and buried his face amid the blankets in his trembling hands.

The two boys regarded him with looks of amazed commiseration.

"I wonder what ails him?" whispered Billy; "is he queer?" He tapped his forehead significantly as he asked the question, and Dave replied by a nod of acknowledgment.

"A little off now and then," he whispered, "but I never see him so bad before; he's subject to these sort of fits every once in a while, but he gets over 'em again. Folks say they're 'liptic, (probably Dave meant epileptic), and when he comes to, he's stupid for a while—

he's comin' 'round now; watch him, but don't say nuthin'."

Sure enough, the occupant of the cave was recovering, for he arose to his feet and passed his hands wearily across his forehead, as if endeavoring to collect his thoughts.

"Oh, I remember," he said finally, as a sad smile played around his eyes and mouth, "you're quite welcome to the hermit's den, Dave, both yourself and companion; let's see, what did you say his name was?"

"Billy Button, Jethro; Billy, this is Mr. Jethro Baxter."

"Yes, the folks call me the Hermit of Cypress Hills, now and then," said Baxter, smiling again, "you are quite welcome, Mr. Button."

"That ain't my handle, Mr. Baxter," replied Billy, with equal humor, "no more than yours is 'the Hermit.' My name is William Westlake, although they call me Billy Button on the bills."

"William Westlake!" ejaculated Baxter, as the strange look came into his eyes once more. "That was her name, too; where do you hail from, boy?"

As he asked the question, Baxter seized our hero's hand so closely in his own as to cause him to wince with pain.

"Say, play it light, Mr. Baxter," said Billy, endeavoring to withdraw his hand from the grasp of his entertainer; "my hand ain't quartz, and I don't want it pulverized if it is—you're a little too stiff on the shake."

"Yes—yes," replied the man, "pray pardon me. I did not mean to hurt you, but simply desired to ask who you were and where you were born."

"Now you've got me," replied Billy. "I could not answer those questions definitely if I was under oath."

"But your mother's, father's name?" demanded the hermit, eagerly.

"I never heard of my father's name," replied Billy. "I guess mother didn't take much stock in him, no more than he did in me, for I never saw him, nor did I ever hear mother mention his name, that I can remember; her name was Mary Westlake, and that is all that I know about it."

"Ah—ah!" gasped the hermit, rubbing his hands elatedly; "light dawns—it is not so dark as I thought—there may be hope for me yet. Does your mother still live, boy?"

"No; she died some nine years ago."

The old man grasped his breast again, and came near having another spasm, but by a strong effort he overcame his emotion and proceeded to question our hero further.

"Your comrade has informed me that you are in trouble," he said, "and at his request I promised to harbor you for a day or so; would it be too much to ask that you repose confidence in me, and tell me the nature of your trouble? perchance I can be of more assistance to you than you imagine."

Billy paused a moment and then resolved to humor the old man, so he told him his story as briefly as possible.

A strange look hovered over the hermit's features while he was doing so, and when Billy had finished he remained seated for some time as if in deep thought.

"Thank you," he said, at length, "you have rendered me great service; far greater than you can imagine, my son; and in turn I will see to it that you escape your pursuers and manage to reach New York. It will not be safe under the circumstances for you to go to East New York to-night. It is more than probable that this detective and his party were pursuing you on the down train, which must now put back to Union Course in order to let the other one pass. If you go to East New York you will undoubtedly be arrested, therefore it will be better for Dave to wait here until to-morrow, and quietly inform your circus friends where you have gone, and meantime you must accompany me to the city."

"That's what I intended doing had I remained here," replied Billy, "or if I could have reached East New York in advance I could have easily evaded this sleuth-hound, and no thanks to him either."

"It is too late," replied the hermit; "there goes the train now," and as he spoke the rattling sound of the passing engine was heard, and the rude hut trembled from the concussion.

A few moments passed, and then Baxter bade our hero follow, and shaking hands with

Dave, Billy went out into the darkness with his mysterious guide.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE CITY OF THE DEAD.

A FEW paces below the hut of Jethro Baxter, there was a cut through the railroad embankment to afford egress for the farmers, and through this cut Jethro led Billy, and made in the direction of the Jamaica plank road.

"You ain't afraid of ghosts, are you, Westlake?" asked the hermit, with a grim chuckle.

"Don't know," replied Billy; "never saw one, so I can't say."

"I hope you never will, lad," said the hermit.

"I know a man in New York, who says that he will give twenty dollars for a genuine bottled up ghost, and he hasn't had an applicant for the money, and yet there are persons—many of them, I fear—who have haunted hearts."

Jethro uttered a sad sigh as he passed moodily on.

"Why did you ask that question?" demanded Billy, who pitied the lonely man from the bottom of his heart.

"Oh, nothing—nothing," said the other, "only that I was about leading you through Evergreen Cemetery; it is a dreary spot at night, and many would not dare venture to cross it."

"If you have no fear," replied Billy, courageously, "I'm sure that I have not, so set your mind at rest."

"You are a lad of pluck," said Jethro.

"I think that I need it, after all that I have passed through," said Billy proudly; "we are accustomed to banish fear in the circus. A lad who funks has no place in the ring."

"That's true, and he ain't considered worth much in the world either."

"Don't amount to shucks," said Billy.

For a time neither spoke as they tramped swiftly onward.

They crossed the road, and passing up the hill to the northwest, entered the cemetery through a broken space in the palings.

The storm was over and the lonely abode of the dead was rendered more lonely still by the dense gloom that surrounded them like a funeral pall, save when a momentary flash of lightning revealed the ghost-like trees and white tombstones, and the rumbling thunder struck terror to the heart.

"This is where they bury those who have no friends," said the guide, gloomily; "possibly I may rest here myself some day."

"Let me be your friend, Baxter," said Billy, creeping up to the side of the recluse and holding out his hand; "you seem lonely enough, God knows, and I, too, have not a living relative in the wide—wide world."

"How do you know that?" asked Jethro, pausing and regarding our hero curiously with his deep, flashing eyes.

"Why?" gasped Billy, as a lump arose with a choking sensation in his throat; "do you know anything of my past history?"

"Perhaps," replied the strange man. "Let us shake hands and be friends, but ask no further questions until I am ready to speak myself."

He stepped forward with outstretched hand as he spoke.

Billy also stretched forth his hand but there came no returning grasp.

A vivid flash lit up the gloomy place and he saw that he was alone.

He was standing by a new-made grave.

## CHAPTER XX.

### IN THE GRAVE-YARD.

As the momentary flash of vivid light passed away, leaving Billy Button in total gloom again, it seemed to him as if he could still see the yawning grave depicted at his feet, illuminated by a weird blaze of sulphurous flame.

What terrible disaster had befallen his mysterious guide?

Was it a dream, after all, that held him enthralled amid its terrible fascination, or had the days of enchantment and *diablerie* returned to earth again as of yore, and was Jethro Baxter a ghoul or vampire who had enticed him alone at this dreary hour of midnight to the abode of death to feed upon his vitals, or suck his blood to renew a hideous lease of life?



It is scarcely to be wondered at that some such appalling and blood curdling thoughts passed through the startled boy's mind, as he stood there dreading to move amid the drear darkness that seemed to chill and freeze his bones to the very marrow. Circus people and theatricals, too, for that matter, are as a class extremely superstitious, and although Billy had firmly and stoutly assured Jethro on their way to the cemetery that he had no fear of ghosts, it may be correctly asserted that just at this instant he was about as well scared as any one—even had they been much older than himself, could have been under the circumstances. He had heard, during his sojourn amid the Knights of the Spangles, many a hair-breadth and blood-curdling story, and the greater portion of his reading had been devoted to the "Dick Turpin," "Claude Duval," and "Tower of London," style of literature; consequently, for the once Billy found his knees growing weak, trembling violently beneath him.

"This is terrible," said Billy to himself; "I wish I was well out of it. I'm beginning to funk about the stomach. I wonder what's going to turn up next?"

A low, hollow groan followed, as if in answer to the half-formed question, and Billy felt the cold chills running up and down his back, as his hair began to bristle in the most startling manner.

He looked anxiously about him to discover where the sound came, and as he did so he darted backward with a startled cry.

"Merciful powers! what's that?" he demanded, as his eyes glowed like balls of fire into the darkness directly ahead of him.

The exclamation of dismay was occasioned by a strange, unearthly, pale blue light, that came dancing amid the tall trunks of the ghostly-looking trees, and finally centered itself in a stationary circle upon a white tombstone directly in front of him.

It was a startling and appalling sight. Our hero had heard of grave lights—those pale, spectral flames that shoot up from the graves of persons recently buried, and flit around uneasily like will o' the wisps, until they finally disappear like thin mists in the air. He had heard them described as the uneasy, restless spirits of the dead who had died with some untold terrible secret on their minds, which they were doomed to carry with them to the grave, and wander to the earth again each night until they could find some mortal bold enough to question them of its import.

"Was this one of these unfortunate spirits?" thought Billy. He would question it, at least, and, if so, relieve it of its burden.

"Who and what are you?" he demanded, in trembling accents.

"Oh—"

Again the low, wailing groan came floating to his ears, and at the same instant the pale blue circle commenced flitting uneasily from side to side, lowering and lowering itself until it rested just at the head of the yawning grave at his feet.

By this time all of Billy's courage had sunk to the toes of his boots and held him firmly anchored to the spot; otherwise he would undoubtedly have run away as fast as his legs could carry him.

In fact he made a desperate effort to do so, but his limbs thoroughly refused to obey his impulse, and as he stood there gazing despairingly at the unearthly-looking light he saw a ghastly-looking head with unkempt hair, and beard dripping with muddy water, slowly emerging from the grave. The eyes were wild and blood-shot, and a strange, unearthly glare in their expression, while the livid pallor of the deathly face was rendered doubly more hideous by a cut across the forehead, from which the blood was trickling in a sluggish stream.

It was too much for Billy's endurance.

He uttered a hideous yell, and falling on his knees buried his face in his hands to shut out the horrible apparition.

"Where am I?" came the low utterance of a voice.

"I remember now, I must have had another turn—I'll die in one of these fits yet—I know too well I will."

Billy recognized the voice in an instant.

It was that of Jethro Baxter.

"Oh, is it you?" he demanded, leaping to his feet, now thoroughly ashamed of his fears, although he had not yet recovered from his trepidation.

"Yes, I am subject to falling fits, as they term them—epilepsy—and I must have fallen

into a grave; give me a hand to get out. I ain't thoroughly recovered yet."

Billy gave him a hand and assisted him from the grave.

"Did it hurt you much?" he asked anxiously.

"What, the fall?"

"Yes; your head is cut."

The old man passed his hand dreamily across his forehead and wiped away blood with his sleeve.

"It's only a scratch," he said. "I'm used to it. I've had many a rough tumble in my time."

As he spoke a flash of light fluttered across his face.

"What was that?" he demanded, looking suddenly around.

"That's just what I wanted to know," answered Billy, anxiously. "I saw it just after you took the tumble, and I thought it was a grave light!"

"Nonsense; those are simply gaseous exhalations from the decaying bodies. This is more practical, and pertaining to the living."

"What do you mean?" asked Billy, not comprehending Baxter's meaning.

"I mean that it is the lantern of body-snatchers!" replied Baxter, bitterly.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE BODY-SNATCHERS.

"A BODY-SNATCHER?" ejaculated Billy, in dismay. "They're pretty rough customers, them chaps, ain't they?"

"Yes, as rough as they make 'em," replied Baxter. "Most lawless men are, and these harpies are the most reckless of the lot."

"Digging some one up now, eh?" demanded Billy.

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Sell him to the doctors afterwards?"

"Possibly—and again it may be an especial order," replied Baxter. "It's a big haul, if it is."

"Why?" asked Billy.

"Make a hundred or two, like enough, in the latter case—former don't amount to over twenty-five dollars, if they make that."

"I'd like to see 'em do it," said Billy, wistfully.

"Get the money?" snapped Baxter.

"No—the dirty brutes! See 'em dig up the body. Wonder how they do it without disturbing the grave?"

"Come along, and you shall see," replied the old man. "I've had my eyes on these ghouls for some time, and I may be able to show 'em up yet. But the time hasn't come—it hasn't come yet."

And with the same strange expression in his eyes that our hero had noticed at his introduction, but which of course he could not at present see, owing to the intense darkness, Jethro led Billy away over the dripping graves.

"Be very careful," said the old man, in a low, warning whisper. "Follow me closely and avoid making the slightest noise. These fellows have eyes like owls and the ears of a rat, and they'd just as lieve kill a man as they would take a drink of whisky."

The two passed cautiously on.

Occasionally the strange, pale, blue light played around their path in an undulating way, and every time it did so, the old man dodged suddenly down behind a tombstone, or hid in the favorable shadows of one of the umbrageous trees.

Billy followed him closely, taking the same precautions, until they finally approached a more pretentious portion of the cemetery, where the tombs reared up in pretentious dimensions, the plots were fenced in with stately palings, and the sweet fragrance of flowers perfumed the air.

Close to this spot the old man paused.

"You must be extremely careful now," he said, pointing with his finger; "the wretches are working yonder, and a splendid night they have of it for the job. You can see them moving around now."

Looking in the direction indicated, Billy saw that he spoke the truth, for four men were hastily passing in and out within one of the burial plots. They were dressed in dark rubber suits. Two carried long-handled, sharp-pointed spades, another a pick-ax and a long rubber bag, while another, who apparently was bossing the job, carried the blue-glass dark-lantern, which had been the cause of such a terrible fright to Billy Button.

"Come this way," said Baxter, taking Billy

by the arm, and drawing him behind an adjoining tomb, around which he passed until they had gained a secure position from which they could see to better advantage.

"This is the one," said the leader of the resurrectionists, bending down and directing the rays of his bull's-eye lantern at the head of a new-made mound; "commence here."

The grave was neatly sodded, but as yet no stone had been set up.

One of the men, bearing a spade, moved back one pace from the indicated spot, and commenced carefully removing the sods from the solid sward of the plot, placing them upon a large piece of rubber cloth, that had been spread for that purpose upon the grass-plot.

When the sods had been removed within a space of about two feet wide, the two diggers fell actively to work, and tossed up the gravelly soil upon another piece of rubber cloth placed on the other side to receive the earth.

Down—down, they dug, in a slanting direction, until they had reached a depth of nearly six feet, when the spade of one struck against an object that emitted a hollow sound.

"That is the head of the coffin," whispered Baxter, in a voice that caused Billy's heart to leap with terror: "watch closely."

Billy did so, with his eyes fairly bulging from his head.

Then the man bearing the pick-ax, who hitherto had had no reason to exert himself, passed down some implements that our hero could not comprehend the use of, and a hollow ripping sound ensued.

"They are ripping out the head of the coffin," whispered Jethro, earnestly. "Watch!"

Presently one of the men emerged from the opening of the pit.

He seized a long, slim rope, and tossed it down to his comrade.

The two watchers heard a rending, scraping sound within the pit followed by a heavy thud, and then the other man leaped from the opening, gasping for breath.

A fetid, sickening stench floated from the pit, and a pale blue glare arose from the mouth of it, as the three men seized the rope, and commenced pulling stoutly upon it.

And as they pulled lustily away, a limp, shrouded form was drawn to the top, and speedily consigned to the rubber bag.

"That's the way they do it," whispered Baxter to Billy. "Now watch how easily they cover their tracks."

Meanwhile, the rubber bag had been carefully secured at the opening, and laid to one side, and the men fell to work to fill in the opening at the head of the grave.

This was speedily accomplished, the earth being thrown back from the rubber cloth on the right of the pit.

Then they commenced to readjust the sods, which required more care.

This took some time, and they had nearly completed the task, when, in arranging the last sods, one of the laborers struck something with his spade.

"I wonder what that is," said the man, turning up the earth with his shovel; "it sounds like metal."

He tossed over the earth as he spoke, and stooping down, held something up in his hands.

The leader approached and turned the rays of his lantern fully upon it.

The laborer held it up to the light.

It was an iron chest.

As the rays of the lantern illuminated the chest, our hero uttered a gasp of surprise and started forward as if to interrupt the desecrators of the grave.

"What do you mean?" demanded Baxter, pulling him hastily backward. "Would you spoil all, and have our throats cut?"

"I tell you that is my mother's iron chest," shouted Billy, endeavoring to get away from the retaining hand.

But before the words had fully passed his lips Jethro placed his hands over his mouth and forced him back upon the grass.

"Be careful!" hissed the old man in his ear. "They are desperate men and will not be stayed in their purpose. If it is as you say, we'll watch them to the bitter end. I know every man in the party, and can lay my hand upon them whenever I like. But this is no time to proceed to extremes. Keep quiet; trust me. I know what I am doing, and all will be well in the end."



## CHAPTER XXII.

## FOUND AMID THE TOMBS.

As Jethro Baxter finished speaking, the four resurrectionists had finished examining the iron chest.

"It ain't so heavy after all," said the finder; "neither is the stiff, and I guess we can get along with both together. What d'ye say, pard?"

The question was addressed to the leader of the gang.

"Better leave it here till the next time we come," responded the latter. "It's getting late, and we ain't got any time to lose."

"I'm cursed if I do!" responded the finder, with an oath. "I'd rather walk to New York and carry it than run the risk of losin' it."

"Well, let's get the stiff to the wagon," said the leader, persuasively; "and you can return and get it; put it where you found it, and restore the sod; there's no danger of any one coming after it such a blasted night as to-night."

"That's so," replied the finder, restoring the chest to its hiding-place, with a peculiar smile pervading his evil features, "but if you lose anything, pard, don't blame me."

"Certainly, hurry up," replied the leader; "come, lively."

The two workmen replaced the sods carefully and trampled them down, and then the man with the lantern examined the ground in every point.

"That job's well done," he said, as he arose from the survey and replaced the slide: "now come along."

Two of the resurrectionists lifted up the sack containing the body and moved away, while the leader rolled up the rubber cloths and followed with the other, carrying the pickax and shovels.

As soon as they were gone, Baxter seized our hero's hand earnestly.

"We must have that chest!" he said.

"Certainly," returned Billy, returning the grasp, "and now is our time."

Baxter nodded, and the next moment they were crawling amid the darkness toward the top of the grave.

"This is the spot," said Baxter, feeling carefully around; "my eyes are keen as a ferret's."

He removed the sod as he spoke, and digging downward with his hands, held up the iron chest.

"Have you got it?" asked Billy, eagerly.

"Yes," responded Baxter, as he laid down the chest and replaced the sod, "and nobody would imagine that it had been removed; thank Heaven, it is all right at last!"

He seized the chest and arose to move away.

"Hold up," said Billy, retaining him by the arm; "whose grave is this?"

"It is bodiless," replied Baxter, wildly.

"Did not you see them remove it?"

"Yes, but I want to know whose it was?" demanded Billy, sternly. "Whose it was before they took the body?"

"You ask too much," shouted Baxter, clutching the chest desperately. "There is no stone, boy, and we have waited altogether too long as it is."

"I will know!" replied Billy, with equal determination.

"Come, I say," whispered Baxter, hoarsely; "they will be back presently, and we shall lose all."

"No," replied Billy, stooping down near a monument that reared aloft in the center of the plot; "I'll know more before I move a step."

He lit a match as he spoke.

The pale, blue light brightened into a flare, and holding it toward the shining granite shaft, he read the name of:

"JAMES RATHBONE."

And then the light went out.

He heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

He felt his hand stoutly seized by that of his companion, and again he was being hurried away over the slimy, slippery graves.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## MADEMOISELLE WILHELMINA DE BOUTONNER.

It was nearly one o'clock on the afternoon subsequent to the events detailed in the last chapter, that an extremely ragged-looking specimen of humanity approached a tall, lithe-looking man, who was standing on the

stoop of Henry Lubb's Hotel, in East New York.

Said tall man was calmly smoking, as the aforesaid put in his appearance.

"Say, mister," said the boy, for he appeared no more, "I want to see yer."

"Well, see me," said the other, withdrawing his cigar, with a quizzical smile; "it won't cost you nothing; what can I do for you?"

"I want to see yer in private," replied the other, sheepishly, but looking cautiously around as he made the remark. "I was told ter do so, and I'd come before but I couldn't help it."

"Come this way, my lad," said the man, strolling leisurely toward the shed at the end of the building, and on reaching it he said again; "what can I do for you?"

"Billy Button sent me to you," replied the boy, removing a green patch from one eye, beneath his ragged hat, and replacing it instantaneously. "Don't you know me?"

"I should say so," laughed Sam Lathrop, for the tall man was none other than the festive clown, "but the devil himself wouldn't have known you, Dave, under that make-up; you're a perfect fakir, and no mistake, I didn't think it was in you; what's up, and where is Billy?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Dave Wright, for the ragged urchin was Billy's staunch friend and admirer. "He left me up the road last night, after we left you, at a place I can't mention for the life of me just now, but it's all square, not'ithstandin', and desired me to tell you he'd gone on to Lent's."

"Oh, is that so?" replied Sam. "I was afraid that he'd been snapped—well, it's all right if he's there—he's in good hands. But I'm afraid that the show'll miss him. Tell me all—it's all right."

Dave did so, as far as he knew in a few words.

"It's too bad," remarked Sam, as Dave concluded, "but I suppose we can't help it, and will have to put up with it. Come in and take a drink."

"Can't," replied Dave, manfully; "promised Billy I wouldn't, and I mean to stick to my word."

"That's right," replied Sam, laughing, "stick to your biz; Billy's a teetotaler, and I don't see why you shouldn't be if you make you make your mark as he did; but I'd like to see him stepping out in the ring this afternoon, all the same."

"So you shall," replied a genial voice, and turning around, Sam Lathrop saw a jovial-looking little lady mounted on a sprightly black horse, smiling down upon him.

She was attended by an elderly man, riding a dusty-looking specimen of chestnut colored horse flesh.

Dave jumped up as if he had been shot and looked curiously up at the smiling little maiden.

"I was looking for Mr. Samuel Lathrop, the jester," said the pleasant-faced young woman, demurely; "and I was informed that you were he; am I right?"

"Yes, at your service, miss. What can I do for you?" Please excuse me."

The latter to Dave.

Sam turned away to accompany the lady and her companion, and as he did so, Dave stood scratching his head in the most incomprehensible manner.

"Blame take it!" said he, finally, as he turned away, "dern it, ef I didn't think that was Billy Button himself."

And upon the same afternoon, when it was announced to the disappointed audience that owing to the sudden and severe indisposition of Master Billy Button, it would be necessary to substitute the new and charming French equestrienne, Mlle. De Boutonner, in his place, many in the audience would have expressed the same opinion had not that fair lady made her appearance in all the floating drapery of a sylvan sylph.

And once again Starbuck Hanlon and his canine companions were out and uninjured.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## NOT MUCH OF A CLEW AFTER ALL.

As soon as Jethro had pulled Billy some hundred yards away from the spot where they had found the iron chest, he paused a moment in his flight, and gave Button a pretty hearty shaking up.

"You infernal young scamp!" he shouted, angrily, "why can't you hold your tongue?"

You came near spoiling all, and getting our throats cut in the bargain."

"Yes," replied Billy shaking himself loose, "maybe I did, but I wanted to get that chest, and would have done so if you hadn't stopped me; but I don't see what right you've got to be shaking a fellow around in this fashion, no matter what I did."

"You'd like to take a hack at the old man, eh?" replied Jethro, grimly, as he placed his arms akimbo, and regarding Billy with a quiet, pleased expression, which of course the boy couldn't see in the dense gloom.

"I like your grit, youngster, and I wouldn't mind giving you a chance to shake me if you could, old as I am, notwithstanding all I've done for you to-night, and mayhap saving your life—but we hain't got time just at present, nohow."

"Excuse me, Mr. Baxter, pray, forgive me," replied Billy, cooling down considerably as he realized what a fool he was making of himself by defying his best friend; "but I'm somewhat touchy when I'm a bit riled. I ain't much used to being crossed, and I was all-fired mad when I see that wretch with poor mother's chest in his pestiferous old hands."

"I don't blame you a bit, my lad, but it's sometimes best to be cautious when you're stirring up muck, you know."

"That's so," replied Billy, "and he was about as mucky as they make 'em, I reckon. I wonder whether the scamp didn't put it there himself? He seemed to tumble to it pretty readily."

"I guess not," answered Baxter, thoughtfully; "he seemed rather surprised at finding it."

"Well, maybe he didn't," replied Button, "only the thought struck me, and I put the question, that's all."

"I don't believe he did, but if he did, he'll be somewhat confounded when he finds it missing," and the old man uttered a pleased chuckle as the thought presented itself.

"That's so, too," said Billy, laughing in turn, "but we've got it safe enough now, and we'll know the whole mystery soon enough."

"Yes," said Baxter, somewhat sadly, "and I hope it may prove satisfactory to you, lad. But come along, we'll soon be on the Cypress Hills road, and I know a place a bit down where we can make the examination without fear of discovery," and starting again he moved quickly on, closely followed by his companion.

They passed through the dark cemetery, threading their way continuously amid the drenched groves, and finally crawling through another opening in the palings, found themselves upon an open road.

Baxter cautioned Billy to keep close to the fence, and crept carefully along for some quarter of a mile further, when they came to a small tavern, from which a light shone out, shedding its bright rays across the dark, muddy road.

Just then the sound of approaching wheels was heard.

"Hush!" whispered Baxter, drawing Billy close to the fence, and stooping down, both hid themselves behind a small clump of bushes fronting the path of light.

Presently a long, narrow, black wagon drove up, and paused in front of the low tavern.

Four men sprang from the vehicle and fastened the horse to the hitching-post.

They ascended the tavern stoop and knocked at the door, which was speedily opened, and they passed in.

"That's them," whispered Baxter.

"Who?" demanded Billy.

"The resurrectionists."

"How do you know?" asked Billy.

"Didn't I tell you I knew them in the cemetery?" returned Baxter; "and I'll make it hot for 'em yet."

Billy uttered a surprised whistle.

"Hush!" muttered Baxter, warningly, placing his fingers over his lips, "don't move, for your life. I'm going over to see what they've got."

And before Billy could make a reply, the strange old man crept cautiously across the way on tip-toe.

As he neared the wagon the horse stamped uneasily, and craned his neck around toward the intruder, while there came a threatening growl from the interior of the wagon box, as a wicked-looking dog poked his nose above the dashboard in a threatening attitude.



But Baxter appeared to pay but little attention to either warning, for he approached the horse's head and passed his hand caressingly over his nose, who replied with a low, pleased whinny of delight.

Baxter then passed to the wagon, and held his hand out toward the dog.

The animal snarled and displayed his fangs defiantly at first, but presently, as Baxter drew closer, he stretched forth his nose, sniffing at the extended hand, and then, with a half whine, turned around and lay down in the wagon.

This took him several minutes when he got down and recrossed the road, where he knelt carefully down by Billy again.

He had scarcely done so when one of the men came out from the tavern door.

He was speedily followed by the others.

"We better be getting along lively, boys," said the first comer, whose voice Billy recognized as that of the leader of the resurrectionists; "the storm is over and the moon will be out again in less than fifteen minutes, bright as day."

"You bet," replied the other, "but I'd like to know where the—that chest went to, I would."

"Maybe it's Captain Kidd's treasure, and it's sunk to Davy Jones' locker along with its fiendish owner. Get in."

"Nonsense," replied the other, but he trembled nervously as he stepped into the wagon, where he was followed by the others, and it was driven rapidly away.

As soon as it was out of sight, Baxter arose and beckoned for Billy to follow.

He led the way across the road and tapped at the tavern door.

"Can you let me have a private room for half an hour?" asked Baxter.

"Certainly, Mr. Baxter," replied the landlord, who was evidently well acquainted with the mysterious man, "come this way."

He led them into a small room back of the bar, and turned up an oil-lamp to the full height.

"What will it be?" he said.

"Give me a hot rum," replied Baxter; "what will you have?"

"I never drink," replied Billy, stoutly.

"Better bring him a cup of warm coffee."

The landlord disappeared, and presently returned with the order, and placing it on the table withdrew.

As he did so, Baxter crossed the room and listened carefully at the door.

"The coast is clear," he said, returning to the table, and withdrawing the iron chest from beneath his worn coat, where he had held it securely concealed, "and now to elucidate the mystery."

He placed it on the table as he spoke.

A look of surprise crossed his features.

"What is the matter?" demanded Billy, anxiously.

"The chest is open," replied Baxter, with considerable concern, as he opened the lid.

The two gazed into it with a puzzled expression.

The iron chest was perfectly empty.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

BUT IT AMOUNTS TO SOMETHING.

POOR Billy was so utterly dumfounded at the result of the discovery that for a few moments he remained completely speechless.

"It's too bad," he said; "it seems as if I am constantly doomed to disappointment."

"You'll find that is the case with us all, my young friend, I am afraid," replied Baxter, thoughtfully, "and the more thoroughly the longer you live. But that has little to do with the case in point; the question now is, where are the documents that were contained in this iron chest?"

He struck the chest stoutly with his fist as he spoke. As he did so, there came a sharp, clicking sound, which was followed by something that resembled the winding of a watch, or sudden running down of the weights of a clock when the spring breaks.

Billy's jaw dropped, and he moved his chair backward from the table, leaping to his feet and making toward the door.

"Hold!" shouted Baxter, sharply, as he, too, sprang up and laid his hand upon his comrade's arm. "Stop where you are!"

"But, it may go off and blow us into smithereens!" gasped Billy, turning pale, as he strove to release himself from Baxter's grasp.

"Nonsense!" replied Baxter, half smiling at the boy's alarm. "Do you forget that it is eight years since you have seen it, and per-

haps it may have lain where we found it for nearly, if not quite that length of time?"

"That's so," replied Billy, resuming his seat, but regarding the chest with extreme caution, notwithstanding his assumed bravery.

"It is," said Baxter, taking up the box and examining it closely. "It is just eight years, and this box is scarcely corroded. It has never been in the ground that length of time, by any means."

"What!" demanded Billy, his courage gradually returning as he heard his companion's remarks. "What new discovery have you made?"

"Let us see before we stop to talk," replied Baxter, turning over the chest. "It is singular that it shows no sign of being placed in the earth."

It did not, but as he turned it over there came another clicking sound, and at the same instant several papers fell out upon the table.

Billy's eyes filled with a look of glad surprise as he saw them, and he bent anxiously forward, with outstretched hands, to seize them.

"Hold!" said Baxter, sternly. "I have a better right to these papers than you."

"By what right?" demanded Billy, stoutly, leaping to his feet and springing around the table to seize them from the intercepting grasp of the old man.

"Because I know what they are, and who placed them there."

"You shall not have them!" shouted the manly boy, decisively. "They are mine. They belonged to my dead mother, and I claim them, as her child, as my just right."

"You have no right to them as yet," responded the strange man, with equal decision.

"Why?"

"Because she was not your mother?"

Billy sprang back, clutching his breast as if he had been stricken a death-blow.

His heart told him that Baxter spoke the truth, as it turned icily cold at the words.

Yes, all loomed up before him with vivid distinctness, and as he realized again the crushing words that destroyed all his hopes, the poor boy sank back into his chair, completely prostrated at the maddening disclosure.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

TRACKED TO THE DEN.

FOR some moments after Billy had fallen forward upon the table with his head resting disconsolately upon his arm, Baxter regarded the unfortunate boy with a look of fatherly commiseration, and then, passing his hand quietly forward, he took up the papers that had fallen from the iron chest.

The manuscript was closely written upon thin, fine paper, in the plain penmanship of a scrivener, and had evidently been completely and carefully done.

Baxter read it all through, while a stern, sad look pervaded his face. Several times his lips trembled and his brow wrinkled, and as he concluded the perusal and consigned it to his pocket he wiped away several tears from his eyes.

He then arose and passing to Billy's side tapped him kindly upon the shoulder.

"Come," he said, persuasively, "don't give up to despair. It is often the darkest before the dawn. Cheer up and trust me. Will you?"

"I don't know who to trust," replied the poor boy, raising his head, with a cold, cheerless look of despair in his red, blood-shot eyes. "I feel as if I just want to lie down and die."

"Don't you remember what I said but a few moments since?" inquired the man, tapping him reassuringly on the back.

"What?" asked Billy, gloomily.

"That I knew the contents of those papers, and who put them in that chest."

"Yes," replied Billy, brightening up a little.

"Well?"

"I repeat it—will you trust me a little further?"

"Yes; what can I do otherwise?" replied the boy, dejectedly.

"That's the way to look upon it, my boy," responded Baxter. "Keep up your heart, and I'll prove myself worthy of your trust. There, drink up your coffee; 'twill serve to strengthen your nerves, and then we must be off for the city."

"I don't want it," replied Billy, with a

motion of disgust. "I don't want anything, I'm completely done up."

"Nonsense; come along," replied Baxter, hiding the chest beneath his coat, "and if I don't tell you something on the way that will put a new life into you, never put faith in the word of Jethro Baxter again."

It was nearly half-past four, and fully daylight on the morning of the events detailed in the opening portion of this chapter, that a closely-covered buggy drove rapidly up Houston street, New York, from the ferry.

On reaching Avenue A, it turned up-town, and finally paused in front of a saloon near Seventh street.

Then a man got out and looked anxiously up and down the street.

To all appearances it was completely deserted. The man went up to the saloon and rang a bell at the side door.

Presently a small wicket in the door opened, and a pair of eyes looked cautiously out.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Stubs?" demanded the man, opening the door. "I thought you couldn't work the plant, or had been snapped. Is it all right?"

"Yes; I've got an amazin' sick woman out here, who wants to rest a bit, and get a private nip," replied the other, pressing out his left cheek with his tongue. "Give us a lift to get her in."

"Putty full, eh?" replied the other, laughing.

"You bet; she's worth twenty canary birds, to say the least."

"It's a go. Toss her in, pal?"

And, leaving the door open, the man proceeded toward the buggy.

"Lift the gal out quietly, Bill," said the first speaker, "and be careful not to awake her—she might squeal."

The man inside laughed as he proceeded to hand out what appeared to be a heavily-cloaked and closely-veiled female from the buggy.

The others took her in their arms and carried her carefully into the house, and then the man in the buggy leaped out and commenced scattering something from a bottle over the pavement in every direction.

A powerful pungent odor arose, and as it subsided, the man reappeared from the house, and entering the buggy, both men drove rapidly away.

As they did so, a couple of horsemen came galloping around the corner of Sixth street and rode hastily up the avenue.

"That's them again, and that's the house," said one, pointing toward the disappearing vehicle. "It's just as I thought—I've tracked them to their den at last."

The speaker was Jethro Baxter, and the words were addressed to Billy Button.

#### CHAPTER XXVII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

A WEEK had passed since the announcement of the sudden indisposition of Billy Button.

The bill-boards of the Old Bowery, that reminiscent Drury of America, and numerous other conspicuous positions of interest in New York were pasted with flaming posters announcing the presence in that city of Sands & Nathan's world renowned circus.

Among the new faces announced to appear was that of Mademoiselle Wilhelmina De Boutonner, whose name appeared in the largest display type.

But to the unqualified surprise of theatergoers, no mention was made of Billy Button.

Many questions were put to the ticket-sellers and attaches, but the universal answer was that Billy was too ill to appear, and that the earliest announcement would be made of his convalescence.

It was a lovely afternoon.

The auditorium of the Old Drury was packed with a dense throng.

Mademoiselle De Boutonner was doing her wonderful principal act.

The theater rang from pit to dome with unbounded applause.

The fair equestrienne leaped lightly into the arms of the clown at the end of the performance, and was about bounding from the ring when a man sprang from the stage-box directly in front of her.

"I want you!" he said, determinedly, as he reached forth his hand to interrupt her progress.

She drew proudly back and waved him off with her hand.



"What do you mean by this untimely intrusion?" demanded the ring-master, stepping briskly forward.

"I hold a warrant for the arrest of this individual," replied the man, firmly; "do not attempt to interrupt me in the service."

"Maybe you better take her," said Sam Lathrop, smiling.

The officer turned suddenly and saw that mademoiselle had disappeared.

He uttered an oath and sprang upon the stage, making for the prompt side.

As he did so, Sam uttered a shrill whistle and turned a flip-flap, amid the roars of the astonished spectators.

At the same instant the deputy suddenly disappeared.

He had gone down a fall-trap.

Roars of applause followed the act, not set down upon the programme, and the audience arose *en masse*.

Meanwhile the astonished officer was vainly endeavoring to make his way up-stairs, amid the inextricable mazes of the props and other theatrical paraphernalia beneath the stage.

Of course, no one offered to assist him, and when he reached the stage his prey was gone.

During the interval a lively scene was transpiring at the rear of the theater.

Mademoiselle had scarcely waited to don her street costume, having simply thrown on a riding skirt and a heavy cloak.

In this apparel she hastened to the stage door. As she emerged two men sprang in front of her.

"I want you, Billy Button!" said one, stretching forth his hand.

Quick as lightning the woman planted a left-hander in his face, and he went down on the sidewalk like a felled ox.

Two men accompanied the lady, who, in turn, tackled the other officer and sent him backward into the gutter, when they bundled their charge into a carriage which was rapidly driven away.

At the same instant a man leaped from an alleyway on the other side of the street and leveled a revolver at the driver of the carriage. But just as he was pulling the trigger a young man seized his arm and sent the bullet whizzing in the air.

"What would you do, brother?" demanded the new-comer; "I tell you, Billy Westlake is innocent of the charge!"

"You lie!" shouted the other, with a savage oath, as he dashed the pistol full in his brother's face and started after the carriage on a dead run. The weapon struck full on the temple, and the wounded boy fell to the pavement with the blood pouring from a ghastly wound. The crowd gathered around, hustling and jostling each other to see the wounded boy.

The assailant was Starbuck Hanlon—the wounded youth his brother Edward.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

STARBUCK HANLON was considerable of an athlete himself, and thus, although somewhat retarded by his brother's momentary interference, he managed to keep the carriage in sight.

The vehicle passed up Elizabeth street on a dead run, the driver plying the whip upon the horses' flanks with his utmost strength.

On ran Hanlon, doing his best to hold his own.

But before they reached Grand street, he felt his breath giving out.

At this moment he caught sight of a butcher's wagon coming toward him.

"Halloo, Billy!" shouted Hanlon, hailing the driver in his loudest voice; "pull up—I want to speak to you."

"All right, Rocks," replied the boy, reining in his horse; "what's the row?"

"I'll give you a fiver if you'll catch up with that carriage!" said Starbuck.

"I'm your mutton," said Butch, gaily turning his cart sharp around. "Hop in lively."

Hanlon leaped lightly in, and in an instant the cart was rattling away as fast as the stout cob could carry it.

Away sped the hack, with the cart rattling closely behind it.

On reaching Allen street the carriage turned up town, the cart following in hot pursuit.

Presently the cob drew up alongside, and Hanlon hailed the driver.

"Pull up your horses!" he shouted, vigorously—"pull up your horses, or I'll have you arrested!"

"Maybe you will," retorted the driver, good-humoredly, as he placed his thumb to his nose with a knowing wink, "and then again maybe you won't."

"Pull up, I say!" shouted Hanlon, "or I'll have you arrested."

"Better wait until you get a cop!" retorted the driver, whipping up his horses afresh.

Away went the carriage with a fresh start. The driver now knew that he was pursued, and he was doing his level best to get away.

By this time both parties were nearing Broome street, and as they did so, a light wagon, with a smart roadster attached, turned the corner.

It contained two police officers. One of them was the captain of the precinct.

Fortunately Hanlon was acquainted with him.

"Head off that carriage, cap!" shouted he, pointing to the vehicle alongside.

"Halt!" shouted the captain, turning his horse across the street to head off the approaching vehicle.

The driver saw that the jig was up, and realized that it would be useless to attempt escape, for the officer was aiming a revolver point black at his head.

"It ain't no use!" he shouted. "Put down your pop, cap. I give in."

He brought his horses to a dead stop as he spoke.

"But it's cussed mean all the same," said the driver, *sotto voce*, as he turned around and looked into the front window of his vehicle.

The next moment his face brightened as if he had won a ten-dollar fare.

"What's up, Hanlon?" demanded the captain, driving leisurely up.

"There's a thief in that carriage," retorted Hanlon, "and I want to have him taken in."

"Is that so, Jack?" asked the captain, who knew the driver well.

"Don't know nothing about it, cap," replied the driver, doggedly. "I'm on the square, and you know it."

"That's so," said the officer, "but if Mr. Hanlon says you have a thief inside, we've got to have him out."

The driver made no reply, and as the officer laid his hand on the carriage door, Hanlon leaped from the cart.

"Better be careful, cap," he said, "he's a desperate character, and slippery as an eel."

"Who is he?"

"Billy Button, the circus clown."

The captain clutched his revolver tightly, and set his teeth as he tore open the carriage door.

"Come out of that lively!" he shouted. "There's no use showing fight, for I'm bound to take you in dead or alive!"

"Not much, at this time," whispered the driver beneath his breath, with a pleased chuckle.

"Come out!" shouted the captain again.

There came no reply.

The captain's face dropped and he peered curiously into the carriage, Hanlon looking over his shoulder at the same time.

They saw a pile of disarranged female garments littering the carriage floor.

They saw that the carriage door on the opposite side was also open.

And this is all they did see.

Of Billy Button not a trace remained.

The carriage was perfectly empty.

#### CHAPTER XXIX.

"WELL, I'll be jiggered!" shouted the captain, bringing his hand down on his hip with a sharp report.

"What's the matter?" inquired the driver, leaning down from his seat with the utmost nonchalance.

"Gone clean as a whistle!" replied the captain.

"Who?" asked the driver.

"Your fare!" replied Hanlon, angrily.

"Where's Billy Button?"

"Billy who?" asked the driver, stupidly.

"Billy Button, the boy who was in this carriage!" retorted Hanlon, almost frothing at the mouth with suppressed rage.

"Don't know anything about any buttons," answered the driver, slowly; "my fare was a lively little French woman belongin' to the circus, named Buton airy, and if she's gone she must have got scared to death and jumped out, breaking her neck. I'll get merry hackensack, bet your life!"

The bystanders laughed at the driver's look of lugubrious dismay, for by this time

quite a crowd had collected and were eagerly asking each other what was the matter.

"Are you quite sure?" asked the captain, turning questioningly to Hanlon.

"Sure as I am that I'm standing here," responded the other; "he must have escaped through the door."

"But what is all this female toggery?" demanded the puzzled captain, turning over the riding apparel.

"Why, that's what he had on when he escaped from the circus," replied Hanlon; "he was disguised as a lady circus rider."

"The deuce you say," retorted the captain; "this will be a lively item for the gentlemen of the press."

"Curse the gentlemen of the press," retorted Hanlon, irefully; "all I wanted was to snap up the cursed young thief."

"Where did this Mademoiselle De Boutonner reside?" demanded the captain, turning suddenly to the driver.

"Up in a private boarding house in Fourth street," replied the man; "several others of the company put up there, too."

"Well," said the captain, turning to Hanlon, "I don't see what we can do about it. If it's as you say, the bird has flown."

"Better hold the hackman," retorted Hanlon, snappishly. "He knows more about it than he lets on, I'll be bound."

"Sorry I can't accommodate you," replied the captain, dryly, who was beginning to feel ashamed of himself at being fooled in such an outrageous manner.

"Come, clear out of this, every man jack of you!" he shouted, turning to the crowd and motioning for them to disperse. "What are you doing here, stopping up the public streets this fashion! Get lively, or I'll arrest the whole of you!"

The throng fell slowly back with many jeering remarks, and then commenced to disperse.

"So you can't arrest the driver?" inquired Hanlon, as his face fell with a dark, moody expression.

"No, sir-ee!" replied the captain, turning toward his wagon.

"Thank you, cap," replied the hackman; "is that all?"

"You get along home with you!"

"No one going to be arrested, hey?" retorted the driver.

"No!" shouted the captain, clambering into his wagon.

"Well, I'm sorry for that," drawled the man; "but if you'll take my word for it, cap you'll arrest that black muzzled man who wanted you to pull me in."

"Why?" demanded the officer, eying him sharply.

"Because he just murdered a young chap down back of the Bowery Theater, and I see him do it!"

"What's that?" demanded the captain, looking up at the hack driver.

The man repeated his words.

"Will you swear to this?"

"I'll swear I saw him hurl a pistol at him, and I saw the young fellow fall. He was just going to fire at me, and the man threw up his arm, discharging the pistol in the air."

"If that's so, I'll have to take you in," replied the captain, springing to the curb and making toward Hanlon.

"The man's lying," retorted the other, edging back to seek a chance to escape.

But his dark face turned a heavy lead color as he spoke.

"You'll have to come along!" said the captain, sternly.

Hanlon made no resistance; he saw it would be useless to do so; and grasping him by the shoulder, the captain led him away to the station-house, having first ordered the hackman to follow in order to make his charge.

#### CHAPTER XXX.

THE reader will have realized by this time that what Starbuck Hanlon said was true, that Billy Button and Mlle. de Boutonner were one and the same.

Thus, when Billy, dressed in the ring costume of the charming French equestrienne, leaped into the carriage while the sheriff's officers were endeavoring to effect his arrest, and the door was closed upon him, he speedily doffed his stage dress and assumed the garments of his proper sex.

A full suit had been placed in the carriage for that purpose when he had been hustled in and whirled away.



It would have been extremely dangerous for a person even of Billy's superior agility to have attempted a leap from the carriage while it was dashing away at such a mad rate.

But, as the driver reined in his horses, and the captain drove up to speak to Hanlon, the stout-hearted boy, with the rapidity of thought, pushed open the coach door and dashed into the street. He darted into the first doorway that presented itself, and rushed through the passage-way to the rear yard.

The fence was extremely high; in fact, nearly nine feet, and Billy being barely four feet six, saw in a second that he could not scale it.

Here was a clear stump.

What should he do?"

It would be impossible, to return to the street, for he would be sure to fall into the clutches of his pursuers; and then, again, they might have seen him as it was, and overtake him at any moment. It would never do to remain where he was, and while he was looking around actively considering the best mode of escape, a burly-looking Dutchman came into the yard to carry away half a dozen empty lager beer kegs that lay scattered around.

One of these lay close to the fence.

Not noticing that any one else was in the yard but himself, Hans stooped down to pick up the keg.

His broad back and stalwart shoulders proved a perfect god-send to Billy.

Quick as the thought struck him, the nimble lad made a run and a jump, and landing plump upon the stout haunch of the stooping man as if it had been a spring-board, he took a flying upward leap, gaining a staunch grasp upon the fence.

Billy scrambled to the top in an instant, and as he threw himself lightly over he could see the surprised beer-jerker picking himself up and rubbing his bruised body vigorously, as he gazed around to see from whence the unexpected blow had come.

But, laughing heartily as he was, Billy never paused to reveal his identity as he dropped hastily to the yard beyond.

Fortunately it was quite deserted, and Button ran hastily into the street.

He pulled his slouch hat closely down over his eyes, and walked quickly back to Grand street.

An empty coach happened to be passing, and hailing the driver he leaped in, bidding the man to drive up-town and he would tell him when to stop.

As the driver complied, Billy pulled down the side blinds, and lay leisurely back upon the rear cushions.

Presently the coach paused a moment, and looking out of the back window, to his unqualified surprise Billy saw the captain of the precinct conveying Starbuck Hanlon to the station-house, followed by a dense crowd of all the ragamuffins and allers of the neighborhood.

Billy did not trouble himself much as to the cause of the arrest, but finding a package of good cigars in the pocket of the coat he wore, he lay back and commenced to smoke with a cheerful expression on his features, as the coach moved on and rolled leisurely up-town.

When they reached Houston street and the Bowery, Billy tapped on the front window and ordered the driver to stop.

The coach came to the curb at once, and getting out, Billy paid the driver a liberal fare and passed hastily down to the vicinity of Second avenue.

He then passed into an English ale-house.

Over the door was an old-fashioned, dingy sign, upon which appeared the simple announcement:

"LENT'S."

"Halloo!" said the proprietor, the only person present but Billy, who was mopping off a table at one side of the bar-room, and removing a couple of empty tobes and ale glasses, "safe back; I was afraid you'd be lagged. There's some one down-stairs waiting for you. Better lay low a couple of days."

"You bet," replied Billy, passing behind the bar into a rear room, which was also empty.

Billy went to a portion of the wainscotting, and touching a secret spring, a concealed door flew open, and closing it behind him, he commenced descending a winding stairway.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

ON reaching the foot of the stairs, Billy found another door, through which he passed, and found himself in a large subterranean apartment, which was comfortably but plainly furnished.

At a table, over which hung a swinging lamp similar to those suspended in the center of a ship's cabin, sat a young man looking over a paper and smoking a cigar.

As Billy entered, the youth looked up and sprang toward him with outstretched hand.

"I'm mighty glad to see you again, Billy," he said. "It pears as if it was a month ago since we parted."

"So it does," replied Billy; "and yet it's scarcely a week ago. Got any news, Dave?"

"Nothing wonderful," replied Dave Wright, "only they was lookin' for you high and low for a couple of days while the show was in East New York."

"Did you go to the show in East New York?" inquired Billy, after a short pause.

"Yes; Sam gave me a pass."

"What do you think of that little French gal?" demanded Billy.

"What—the one that rode the principal act?"

"Yum—yum!"

"She's a screamer; you'll have to look out for yourself, or she'll whop you, Billy."

"Nonsense—you don't say?" replied Billy.

"Don't think I can be beat by a gal, do you, Dave?"

"Well, I wouldn't clean like ter say, Billy," replied Dave, slowly; "but she'll cut putty 'mazin' close to you. Did you ever see her ride?"

"Well, I can't say I ever did," replied Billy. "In fact, it would be mostly impossible under the present circumstances."

"Why, are you so closely confined as that?"

"Well, yes—and no; darn it, Dave, is it possible that you didn't tumble to the racket?"

"What racket?" replied Dave, wonderingly.

"Why, that little French gal was your humble servant; so you see I couldn't very well see myself ride, hey?"

"Get out!"

"It's a fact," replied Billy.

And in as brief a manner as possible Billy told Dave as much of what had transpired since their last interview in the den of the Hermit of Cypress Hills as he deemed essential under the circumstances.

Just as he finished the narrative the door opened and Sam Lathrop stepped into the room.

"Didn't snap you up, hey, after all?" he said to Billy, and then seeing Dave he gave him a hearty grip of the hand. "How did you manage it?" he asked, as he took a seat by the others.

Billy told him, and Sam laughed until his sides ached at the novel use Billy had made of the Dutch beer-jerker's back.

"But he'll have to wear a porous plaster for a week," said Sam.

"Yes, for a weak back," retorted Billy.

"Is that a joke?" asked Sam, dryly.

"Can't say."

"You better not if you don't want to die," said Sam; "there's a standing rule against bad puns, you know."

Billy nodded his head.

"Had a pretty lively scrimmage after you left, Billy," said Sam.

"Thought things looked pretty tough."

"So they did. Hanlon nearly laid his brother out; he came mighty near being a subject for a coroner's inquest."

"Poor Ed," replied Billy; "is he badly hurt?"

"He's got a pretty sore head, but he'll weather it, I reckon."

"Where is he?"

"They took him home in a carriage, but he was pretty badly shaken up."

"Did he come to?" asked Billy.

"Yes, we took him into the waiting-room, and the doctor brought him around."

"Did he say anything about me?"

"Yes, he told me something, and that's the main cause that brought me up."

"What was it?" asked Billy, eagerly.

"He was too weak to explain," replied Sam; "but he told me to tell you that you need have no further fear about the diamonds; and that in case they wanted you, to appear at court at once."

"Is that so? It's the best news I've heard in a month. Billy Button is himself again."

"That's so," replied Sam; "they have billed and announced you in the papers for to-morrow afternoon, and I'll bet you get an ovation."

"Bully boy!" shouted Billy, tossing up his hat. And he was joined heartily in the sentiment by his two companions.

"I'm glad of it, too," said a deep voice, and turning toward the speaker, the trio saw that he was Jethro Baxter.

"Halloo! is that you?" asked Billy, shaking him by the hand.

"Yes," replied Baxter, as a cheerful light blazed in his eyes, "and I have prime news!"

"What is it?" asked Billy.

"I haven't time to explain now," said Baxter, "but I will do so as we go along. I want you to come with me at once."

"Where?" asked Billy.

"You'll find that out also in due time," said Baxter, "but I want both you and Dave to come with me. I've got these heartless harpies dead to rights, and I'll have them safe and sound under lock and key before dawn to-morrow, or never trust Jethro Baxter's word again!"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### PLAYING ITALIAN.

ON quitting Lent's, after supper, somewhere in the neighborhood of nine o'clock, Jethro Baxter led Billy and Dave down Houston street to the vicinity of Allen street, where they entered a second-hand clothing establishment.

The proprietor, a sharp-visaged Hebrew, was apparently awaiting their coming, for, as Jethro entered the shop, he called a boy, who was watching the second-hand habiliments hanging up outside, into the shop, and leaving him in charge, led the way to a rear room, the atmosphere of which was perceptibly impregnated with the odor of garlic and red-herrings, not to speak of a powerful smell of strong schnapps.

"Try a glass of something nische, mine frients?" he said, producing a bottle and glasses; "it vill varin your hearts pefore we proceed to pizness."

"I don't care if I do, Abraham," replied Jethro, good humoredly, as he helped himself to a stiff glass of spirits, and drank it at a gulp. "I want something to brace me up. My young friends never drink—they are teetotalers—but if you have a cigar or two handy I have no doubt they will oblige."

"Chertinly—chertinly," replied Abraham, taking a private nip, and then producing a box of choice Havanas, to which Dave and Billy did full justice by appropriating half a dozen each, and then the old-clothes dealer turned to Jethro again.

"Well, what can I do for you to-night, sir?" he asked, rubbing his hands complacently, while awaiting an answer.

"Give me three stout blue flannel shirts and heavy pantaloons to match; stout woolen socks and brogans; slouch hats and red cotton handkerchiefs," said Baxter, consulting a list that he took from a side-pocket.

"Yesh!" said the Jew, procuring a short step-ladder and placing it against one of the boxed-off compartments of the room: "goin' a-maspueradin', I suppose?"

"You may suppose anything you like," replied Baxter, grimly; "but if any one asks you, tell 'em you don't know."

"You're a funny man," snickered the salesman, getting down with the articles and placing them on a long bench at the end of the room, "but you ought to know me too well, Miester Paxter, to know that I wouldn't gief you away."

"I know that well enough," replied Baxter, as he motioned for Billy and Dave to don the garments, which they did in less time than it would take to describe the operation; "I know that, and for a very good reason, Abraham; because, if you did, I'd make Houston street—in fact, New York itself—so cussed hot that you could not stay here a week without being railroaded to Sing Sing or Auburn?"

"Holt hart, Miester Paxter," interrupted Abraham, as his features turned a sickly green; "don't talk so lout, don't talk so lout. Mien friendt, walls have ears, and there ish no telling who may pe listening, you know."

"That's so," said Baxter, who by this time had finished dressing. "I was only indulging in a pleasant jest; it's a way I have, now and then, when I feel in especial good humor, as I do to-night. Now, I want false beards to match our hair and the commodities to make up."



The Jew immediately produced the requisite articles, and selecting several pigments from the dressing-case, Baxter proceeded to make up himself and comrades in the most skillful and artistic manner.

He darkened his gray locks and whiskers to a deep black, and dyed his skin to an olive tint, until he presented the perfect personification of an Italian.

Billy and Dave were made up in a similar style, and when they had donned their beards their most intimate friends would have passed them readily in the street without imagining their identity in the slightest degree.

"Now, that's all well enough so far," said Baxter, as he examined himself with perfect satisfaction in the glass. "Now, Abraham, give us a brace of loaded revolvers each, and an extra charge or so, and take good care of our duds until we return, and I'll bid you good-evening until you see me later."

The weapons were procured, and placing them carefully in their hip pockets, the trio left the store.

Baxter looked casually up and down the street for an instant or two, and then, apparently satisfied that they were not watched led the way down to Avenue A.

On reaching that thoroughfare he turned north, and walking briskly up till he came to the saloon where himself and Billy had seen the body-snatchers convey their burden, he opened the door and passed in, followed closely by his companions.

Baxter passed leisurely to one of the tables, and taking a seat ordered a lager for himself, and two sodas for Billy and Dave.

As the order was served, the street door opened suddenly, and a tall man, with a slouched hat pulled closely down over his eyes, entered the saloon.

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I AM A UNITED STATES DETECTIVE!"

"That's our man," whispered Baxter, as the stranger entered the saloon and stepped up to the bar; "watch him closely, and when I give the word, remember your instructions, follow me and carry them fully out."

His companions nodded, but made no reply, while the man after making a few inquiries of the barkeeper, took a seat in the corner.

Ten minutes or more passed, and then two rough-looking customers came in, and looking cautiously around, joined the man in the corner.

They conversed for a few moments with the stranger, and then they came over and called Baxter to one side.

Presently Baxter returned to Billy and Dave.

"I don't want you to break your word, boys," he said in a whisper, "but you've got to take a drink this time, or at least pretend to do so. It's a desperate game we are playing, and it requires desperate measures."

"I can stand one drink," whispered Billy, in return; "can you, Dave, and not let the liquor craze you?"

Dave pressed his hand reassuringly, but made no reply, as they responded to Baxter's private signal, and rising, went over to the bar, where the three other men were filling their glasses from a bottle set out by the barkeeper.

"What will you take, lads?" asked the stranger, turning to Jethro's companions.

"My friends no speeka English," replied Baxter, hastily speaking in broken English, "dey are but lately landed, and no used to fire water of dees countree. Hava youa any light wine?"

"Certainly," responded the man, placing a bottle of German wine upon the counter with three glasses.

"Mea lika de whiskey," said Baxter, laughing as he filled his glass; "they no strong heada—maybe gettee better by'm-by."

The three men laughed, and lifting their glasses, hob-nobbed with Baxter and his companions.

"It's all the better, boys," said the stranger, in a half aside whisper to his chums; "these dumb-headed macaronis will prove all the better for their silent proclivities."

The men laughed again, and lighting the cigars which the stranger had also ordered, the whole party left the saloon.

They passed slowly up Avenue A until they reached Fourteenth street, the stranger and his companions taking the lead, while Baxter, Billy and Dave brought up the rear.

But on reaching this point a man joined

the leader, and a hurried conversation ensued.

For a moment the man with the slouched hat appeared considerably put out.

He stamped his feet angrily, and bit his lip, uttering something very like an oath, and then he turned hastily toward Baxter.

"I'm afraid we can't do it to-night," he whispered; "I fear that we are watched."

"I hava come prepared," replied Baxter, quickly; "and mya men expecta dere money."

"I'll see that they are paid to-morrow," said the other; "I have not sufficient cash about me to do so now."

"I can't help dat," replied Baxter. "I promised to paya to-nighta, and they will holda mea to my word."

The stranger stamped his feet with an oath. "Well, come along," he said, angrily, "and I'll get you your bloody money!"

He started hastily up Fourteenth street as he spoke, followed closely by Baxter and his companions.

After crossing Third avenue and passing half way up the block, the stranger led the way up the steps of a large brick building.

It was the University of Medicine of New York.

He opened the door, and ascending a flight of steps, knocked at a door.

It was speedily opened, and the six men were admitted to the apartment.

A short, stout built man, wearing a pair of green spectacles, was seated writing at a table covered with books and papers.

"I want fifty dollars!" demanded the man with the slouch hat, approaching the writer.

"Got anything for me?" was the reply.

"No; the cops are on the lay, and it wouldn't be safe."

"I don't see how I can pay the money in that case," said the other, looking up.

"I can, and I must have it," replied the leader. "I'll make it all right to-morrow night. I've a couple of new hands, and they want their money."

"Oh, is that it?" asked Spectacles. "In that case I guess I can stretch a point. But you know we have to be extremely careful."

"Just so!"

The writer arose, and passing to a safe, took but five ten dollar gold pieces and handed them to the man with the slouched hat.

"Is that right?" demanded the latter, handing the specie to Baxter.

Jethro counted it, and placed it in his pocket.

"It's all right," he said, resuming his natural tone of voice; "now I want to know what you did with that body you took from the plot of James Rathbone, in Evergreen cemetery, a week ago to-night?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say!"

The man stood regarding him with a look of blank amazement depicted upon his countenance; but finally he recovered sufficiently to speak.

"Why do you ask?" he demanded.

"Because I want the body!" replied Baxter, sternly.

"By what right?" inquired the man, bristling up as his myrmidons closed up behind him.

"By the right of the laws of the land!" shouted Baxter, drawing a brace of revolvers and leveling them at the head of his antagonist. "I am a United States detective, and I know what I am asking!"

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was a strange, wild scene that was transpiring in that small room at that moment.

There stood Baxter, with his eyes blazing with intense fury, as he held his revolvers pointed at the head of the resurrectionist.

The baffled harpy stood boldly up, but his eyes faltered beneath the barrel of the revolver.

His comrades had drawn their own weapons almost as soon as Baxter, and as the old man made the thrilling announcement, one of the latter pulled the trigger.

At the same moment two shots rang through the apartment, and one of the resurrectionists fell to the floor with his life's blood flowing from his bosom.

Billy Button had been too quick for him, and a death-telling bullet had found his heart. He was dead almost before his hand pulled the trigger that sent the bullet toward Baxter.

In an instant the fat, spectacled clerk darted behind the huge safe and cowered down, trembling with cowardice, as the cold perspiration started from every pore.

"Hold up your hands!" shouted Baxter, determinedly; "the first man who fires a shot dies on the spot, and his blood be on his own head. I have been watching you, you hell hounds, for the past four years, and I have got you down just where I want you. Surrender and I will give you quarter; if not, every one of you dies on the spot!"

As he shouted the words, Billy and Dave closed up behind him with a revolver in either hand ready to do deadly execution at the slightest movement.

The resurrectionists were in a trap and surrendered without a word.

"Will you tell me where the body is now?" demanded Baxter, sternly.

"Yes," replied the leader of the resurrectionists, bowing his head, and dropping his hands to his side; "come with me and I will show you."

"Thanks," replied Baxter, "that is all I want."

The leader turned to lead the way, and his companions were about to follow him, when Baxter waved them back.

"Stay where you are until we return," he said, sharply, and then he turned and took a hasty survey of the room.

It was an interior, and no visible mode of egress with the exception of the door.

This he closed and locked behind him as he passed out leaving Dave Wright as guard, with orders to shoot down the first man who attempted to escape; and then, accompanied by Billy, he passed up-stairs, with the leader in advance, carefully covered with a revolver.

The man passed leisurely up another flight of stairs, and opening a small door, ascended another winding stairway.

They were now in total darkness, but Baxter took a candle from his pocket, and lighting it with a match, displayed a small room with several barrels ranged together, and a number of wash basins standing upon a shelf at one side.

The leader led them into another room directly adjoining, and bade them light up a gas jet.

Jethro did so.

As the light blazed forth it revealed a long apartment with a stove in the center and a row of marble-topped tables ranged on either hand.

This was the dissecting-room at the college.

"That's your ticket," said the man, pointing grimly toward one of the tables.

It was the only table occupied in the apartment, and the white sheet that covered it was spotted here and there with blood as it bulged upward above the still form that lay beneath.

Baxter's hand trembled visibly as he strode forward and pulled down the sheet.

A ghastly, mutilated figure was revealed. It was the form of a nude female.

The hands of the surgeon had cut and hacked it in the most terrible manner, but the neck and face were still intact, and the flickering light of the gas jet overhead shed a pale, lurid glare upon the decomposing features of the dead.

Jethro's face worked convulsively as he gazed down upon the ghastly object, but he bent forward, nevertheless, and regarded it with intense interest.

Poor Billy's heart was up in his mouth, and he felt a sickening sensation of nausea gnawing at his vitals as he turned aside to restrain his emotions.

"It is not the one I was looking for," gasped Baxter. "I was mistaken, after all."

At the same instant, a rumbling, creaking sound came from the adjoining room, followed by a whizzing noise, and turning, both Baxter and Billy realized that the captain of the resurrectionists had disappeared.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

"CURSE my infernal stupidity!" shouted Baxter, stamping the floor with insane fury. "That wretch has escaped after all."

Baxter ran from the room, followed by Billy, as he spoke, and pointed to a dark closet in the adjoining apartment, where a windlass was arranged with a rope attached, that was swaying unsteadily to and fro.

He said, quickly: "That is the way he made his escape. He has gone down, the fall by which they hoist



the bodies up to the dissecting-room. By this time he is in the street and beyond our reach. What a cursed fool I was!"

"Then that was not the body you were looking for?" inquired Billy, putting a leading question.

"No," replied Baxter, shortly. "But I haven't time to talk now. I'll explain all some other time. Come on."

He returned to the dissecting-room and reverently re-covered the remains of the dead woman, and then led the way down-stairs.

On reaching the room where they had left Dave on guard over the imprisoned resurrectionists, Baxter unlocked the door and called for the men to come forth.

They obeyed at once, followed by the portly individual in specs.

"I don't want you at present," said Baxter, smiling grimly at that important personage's crestfallen appearance. "I suppose that I can find you here whenever I do."

"I can give bail, if you require it, sir," said the man, persuasively, as he smirked and bowed; "but what are we going to do about this here chap?"

He touched the dead body of the resurrectionist with his foot as he asked the question.

"Don't want your bail, neither," replied Baxter. "I guess I can lay hands on you easily enough when I want. As for that car-rion, I'll send a stretcher around for it as soon as I reach the station-house. Come, boys, step out lively now," he resumed, turning to the prisoners, "for I've got lots of other work on hand before I have done to-night."

The men walked quickly out and were marched by Baxter to the nearest police station, where, upon displaying his badge and stating his case, they were sent down to the lock-up.

This matter having been disposed of and a stretcher dispatched for the dead man, Baxter and his friends returned to the second-hand clothing shop in Houston street and removed their disguises.

"Which way are you off to now?" asked Billy, as they came out on the sidewalk in their proper rig.

"I guess we'd better go around to the Red House in the Bowery and get some oysters," replied Baxter. "I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"Ain't it rather out of season for oysters?" asked Billy. "There ain't nary an R in this month."

"R or no R," replied Baxter, "oysters are never out of season to me when I feel like taking them, and that's just my sentiments to-night."

"Honors are easy," laughed Billy. "I'm of exactly the same opinion, and as Billy Wall-et used to say, when he was killing Shakespeare in the sawdust on Astor Place: 'The world's mine oyster, and with my sword I'll open it.'"

"That's quite an apt quotation," said Baxter. "Billy, I owe you one."

"Well, you can pay it when the 'taters come in. Let's trot around and get our oysters," replied Billy, laughing.

They turned up street toward the Bowery and strolled leisurely along.

Just as they were passing Lent's, a man in a citizen's dress came hastily across the street and tapped Billy upon the shoulder.

"What do you want?" demanded Button, drawing back and placing himself on guard.

"None of that, now," said the man, hastily. "I'm ptepared for your tricks, my young buck. You can't play sharp on me!"

"What do you want?" demanded Billy, again.

"I have a warrant for your arrest, William Westlake, alias Billy Button, alias Made-moiselle De Boutonner, and I'm going to take you in!"

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was the morning following the arrest of Billy Button. The court-room of the Special Sessions in the New York Tombs was crowded, as the morning papers had announced that the Boy Clown, Billy Button, had been arrested, and would be tried on the charge of stealing a pair of diamond earrings from Mrs. Wm. Hanlon, of No. — Ninth street.

The judge was sitting at his desk, and as he rapped with his gavel to silence the spectators and call the court to order, the prisoner was brought in and took his seat by the side of his counsel.

Billy's face was wreathed with smiles, notwithstanding his unpleasant situation, and

he nodded pleasantly to a number of friends, most of them members of the company, whom he recognized among the spectators.

The first witness called for the prosecution was Mrs. Wm. Hanlon, the plaintiff, who displayed a still handsome face, as she removed her veil to give her evidence, which was rendered in an extremely low tone of voice.

"It was some eight years ago," she said, in substance, "that I had occasion to quit my residence on Ninth street, on private business, which I do not deem it necessary to explain. My son Edward, with several school-mates, after their return from school, had been in the habit of holding an exhibition of what they termed a circus, in the cellar, where they had erected a sawdust ring and put up curtains and other arrangements for that purpose."

"At first I had deemed these exhibitions harmless, considering it a favorable mode of keeping Edward from gadding the streets with the rough boys of the neighborhood. But the servants finally began to complain that the numerous boys who formed the audience of these performances were soiling the basement hall with their muddy feet, and causing altogether too much work; and I had noticed at the same time that Edward had formed the acquaintance of a little ragamuffin, named William Westlake, with whom he had become the best of friends, and introduced him into the house to play the part of clown."

"This troubled me considerably, because the boy had an extremely bad name, and I feared that he would contaminate the morals of my son, and thus it was that as I left the house on this especial occasion, I gave orders to the servants not to admit any of the boys, and to prevent the performance in case Edward and his companions attempted to carry it on."

"The instructions were fully carried out on the servants' part, but, notwithstanding a close watch, the boys managed to smuggle the audience into the cellar through the slide leading from the coal-hole and the circus took place."

"Inadvertantly, on leaving the house, I had left my bedroom door unlocked and forgotten also to secure a valuable pair of solitaire diamond earrings which lay upon my dressing-table."

"When I returned to the house after transacting the business, my oldest son, Starbuck, who will bear me out in this testimony, met me at the door and informed me that the boys had held their show, as they termed it, and that he had been the means of breaking it up, greatly to the dissatisfaction of his brother Edward."

"I commended him highly for the act, and retired to my room to dress for supper, when I discovered at once that the diamonds were missing."

"I questioned the servants and every one in the house closely, and finally elicited the fact from Starbuck that he had seen the boy, Westlake, close to my door, a few moments after my departure."

"This, however, Edward stoutly denied, as did Westlake on his subsequent examination before Judge Talmadge, both claiming that they had never left the cellar up to the time of their discovery by Starbuck. But, notwithstanding this, the diamonds have never yet been found, although I have placed the case in the hands of some of the most skilled detectives in the city. Westlake was subsequently arrested, but, as we were unable to make a case against him, he was permitted to depart without further examination."

This concluded the evidence of Mrs. Hanlon, and as the attorney for the defense made no cross-examination, she was permitted to step down.

The next witness called for the prosecution was Starbuck Hanlon, who had secured bail and been permitted to go at large.

He fully substantiated the testimony of Mrs. Hanlon, and gave a graphic description of the sneaking appearance of the boy, Westlake, as he saw him coming from his mother's room.

As the witness made this statement, Billy Button arose to his feet, with his face flushing with indignation; but his lawyer skillfully managed to pull him into his seat again and restrain him before he could shout an indignant denial.

Hanlon finished his testimony by describ-

ing the appearance of Edward and Billy in the ring in the cellar, dressed in his silk undershirts and blue striped rowing shirts, which they had—that is, Edward had, as he subsequently admitted—appropriated from his, Starbuck's, wardrobe, to use as tights, the arms being drawn tautly over their legs for that purpose.

As the witness was about to step briskly down from the witness-box, after his testimony, the counsel for the defense caused him to pause, and asked, abruptly:

"Why did you not make that statement concerning the seeing of Westlake coming from Mrs. Hanlon's room on the examination before Judge Talmadge?"

"I did," replied Hanlon, evidently taken aback.

"I ask your honor to remember this," said the lawyer; "that's all; you can step down and out!"

The witness did so, and took his seat near his mother, with whom he continued for some time in a low, whispering conversation.

The next witness called was Bridget Mul-rooney.

"I desire, your honor," said the counsel for the prosecution, as the witness took the stand, "to state that had it not been for this witness we should have undoubtedly been unable to make out a case; but, through her instrumentality, we feel fully confident of proving the prisoner's guilt, notwithstanding the number of years that have transpired since his theft of the diamonds."

"I rise to a point of order!" shouted Billy's counsel, leaping to his feet.

The prosecuting attorney waved his hand and appealed to the court, and, without further parley, Billy's counsel dropped into his seat.

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE witness, who had been a cook in Mrs. Hanlon's house, seemed slightly flustered, but proceeded with her testimony in a straightforward manner.

She stated that on the afternoon in question, having finished cooking the dinner and washing the dishes, she had gone up stairs to her room; that, while passing the door of Mrs. Hanlon's apartment she had seen the boy Westlake coming out. On seeing her he hastily placed something in his pocket. At the time she did not think anything of the matter, as it had been a common thing for both himself and Master Edward to pass freely to and fro through the house; but that, after hearing of the robbery, she came to the conclusion that Westlake was the guilty party.

"Why did you not come forward at the examination and make this statement?" demanded the prisoner's counsel, as she finished her testimony.

"Because I was deadly afeared," replied the witness. "I didn't want to go to court; I was afeared of my life."

"That will do," said the lawyer.

And as the witness stepped down a murmur of dissatisfaction ran through the room, but it was speedily quieted by the officers of the court.

And here the case, on the side of the prosecution, rested.

A brief interval elapsed, and the first witness for the defense was called.

A hushed murmur ran through the court, as Edward Hanlon, with bandaged brow and pallid face, took the stand.

He made a careful statement of the events that had transpired on the eventful afternoon. He fully denied that either himself or any of the boys had quitted the cellar, and then continued his testimony in substance as follows:

"At the time that we held our boys' circus," he said, "my brother, Starbuck, had a pet monkey of mischievous proclivities. In fact, he was such a pest that Starbuck had to keep him chained in his room. I well remember that at the time there was a small hole in the wall between my mother's and my brother's room, just back of the bureau, beside which the monkey was chained, but nothing was thought of the matter."

"What has this monkey got to do with the case?" demanded the prosecuting attorney, with a covert sneer.

"You'll find that out soon enough," replied the opposing counsel, with equal acerbity. "Do not attempt to intimidate the witness. Please proceed."

"Little was thought of the matter at the



time," continued the witness, resuming his testimony, "and possibly would not now, had I not made a strange discovery a few days since, while we were making repairs in our house on Ninth street. I had been appointed by my mother to superintend these repairs in person. It had been my mother's intention for some time past to enlarge her bedroom by tearing down the partition between that room and the one formerly occupied by my brother.

"For a couple of weeks back my mother has been paying a visit to some of her friends in Jamaica, Long Island, and during this interval I determined to have the job completed, and surprise her on her return. I called in some masons and carpenters for that purpose, and while completing the operation I made a most singular and opportune discovery."

"And what was that?" asked Billy's lawyer, with a quizzical smile pervading his features.

"I found these," said Edward, holding up something that sparkled and glistened radiantly in the light of the whole court-room.

Every eye was turned earnestly in the direction of the speaker as he held the shining articles toward the presiding judge.

"What are they?" inquired the puzzled magistrate.

"My mother's missing diamonds," said the young witness, with the utmost nonchalance.

There was a marked sensation in court that it took the utmost efforts of the officers to suppress.

The judge took the articles from the witness, and examining them carefully, requested Mrs. Hanlon to come to the desk.

She complied at once, and the judge asked her to examine the diamonds.

"They are my diamond ear-rings," replied the surprised woman, after a close examination. "I recognize them at once by the peculiarity of the setting."

"They must have been placed there by that cursed monkey!" blurted Starbuck Hanlon, dashing his fist savagely down upon the table.

"Maybe the monkey stole this also," said Billy's lawyer, sarcastically, holding up a rough piece of checked cheviot cloth; "it's rather singular, however, that he should have been able to steal either this or the diamonds, considering that he was chained fast to the bureau."

Again there was a marked sensation in the court-room.

Meanwhile the lawyer quietly took another piece of cloth of the same pattern from his pocket, and spread it out before him upon the green baize covering of the table at his side.

The two pieces corresponded exactly, and fitted to an nicety.

Starbuck seemed to awake from his dream with a sudden start.

With a sudden bound, he started for the court-room door.

But the lawyer was too quick for him; he sprang hastily before him and intercepted his progress.

"I demand the arrest of this man, your honor," he shouted, appealing to the judge. "I proclaim that he is a thief, a perjurer, and a resurrectionist!"

A scene of the wildest confusion ensued.

The judge motioned for an officer to arrest Starbuck.

The desperate man struggled violently, but finally was mastered and secured.

Mrs. Hanlon went into a fit of violent hysterics, and was borne from the room shrieking and struggling desperately, and for some moments it cost the most urgent efforts of the court officers to bring the spectators to order.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHEN quiet had been restored and the excited spectators had resumed their seats, Billy's lawyer arose to explain.

He related in a brief and succinct manner the story of Billy Button. He stated how Mrs. Westlake had met her death, and the subsequent robbery of the iron chest. He related how it had been found buried in the private plot of James Rathbone, in Evergreen Cemetery. He told of the capture of the resurrectionists in the Medical College on Fourteenth street, and startled the listeners with the announcement that Starbuck Hanlon was the purloiner of the chest and the chief of the body-snatchers; and then in a

loud voice he called Jethro Baxter to the stand.

A hushed murmur ran through the court-room as the old detective entered the witness-box and was sworn.

"My name is Jethro Baxter," said the witness, after taking the oath, "and I am at present a United States' detective; but this has not always been my profession. I was formerly a man of leisure, and had had abundant means, until I beggared myself through gambling and riotous living. It is now some twenty-five years since I became acquainted with Miss Jessie Rathbone, the sister of James Rathbone, of Jamaica, Long Island. I had known her but a short time when I fell desperately in love, and asked her hand in marriage, but she had heard of my fast life and refused me at once. Driven to desperation at the refusal, I took to drinking worse than ever, and went thoroughly to the dogs. Two years passed, and during that interval Jessie married a man by the name of Wesley Hubert. The result of the marriage was a male child. The infant grew until it was a year old, and was the light and life of its parents' hearts."

"About this time I first became acquainted with Starbuck Hanlon. He was a young man around town, and lavished money with a free hand. One night, while on a drinking bout, Hanlon and I compared notes and discovered that we had both paid attentions to Miss Rathbone, with similar results. We sympathized maudlinly with each other over our wine, and during the evening Hanlon ventilated a plot which, notwithstanding all its fiendish malignity, he found in me a ready and willing hand to carry out. A week later I entered the room of Mrs. Hubert while she lay asleep, and removing the sleeping child from its mother's arms, bore it away, and placed it in charge of Mrs. Mary Westlake, an old flame of mine, in whom, for a fair consideration, I found a willing accomplice to carry out my revenge. Shortly after this I found my ready money dwindling to a low ebb, and on mentioning the subject to Hanlon he offered me a fair sum, and procured me a situation as supercargo on a Chinese packet running to Canton, with which I made several voyages, but little bettering my condition as I spent my money as freely as it came."

"Returning to New York, after my second voyage, I was unable to discover Mrs. Westlake. She had left her residence, but neither the tenants of the rooms nor the landlord could tell me where she had gone. I consulted Starbuck Hanlon, and he also denied all knowledge of her whereabouts, which I subsequently discovered to be a lie, for it was through his instrumentality that she had been spirited away, when, taking advantage of her insatiate passion for drink, he had plied her with liquor until she sank to the lowest depths of debased womanhood."

"As I have stated, I made a number of voyages on the China merchantman, at the end of each searching everywhere for Mrs. Westlake, but without avail."

"While thus engaged after one of my return trips, a strange desire impressed me to make inquiries concerning Mr. and Mrs. Hubert. I did so, and the ascertained information was so terrible that it nearly drove me out of my mind. It was the means of leaving me afflicted with that terrible malady, epilepsy. I discovered that, after losing her child, Mrs. Hubert had been seized with a brain fever, which resulted in total dementia, in consequence of which her husband was obliged to confine her to a private asylum for the insane."

"The wretched man searched far and near, using every means in his power to discover his child, until finally, driven to desperation, he blew out his brains with a revolver. This intelligence quite unnerved me, and threw me into a severe sickness, on recovering from which, I was on the point of giving myself up as a child-stealer, thus endeavoring to render all the reparation I could for my crime. But on consideration, I thought better of it, and quitting the ship, I devoted all my attention to finding Mrs. Westlake. Somehow I became possessed of the idea that Starbuck Hanlon was at the bottom of the matter, and I watched him like a hawk, shadowing him closely wherever he went, both night and day. But he was too sharp for me, and baffled me at every point. I discovered, however, that he had lost nearly all his means by gambling, and in order to reimburse his purse, he had taken to the nefarious

trade of body-snatching, which, if properly attended to, is quite a money-making speculation. About this time I secured an appointment from the government as a secret officer to hunt up these harpies, and in order to watch them more closely, I pitched my quarters in a cave on the Long Island Railroad, near Cypress Hills, which is the nearest point to nearly all the cemeteries of Kings County and Queens County. As stated, I made but little headway in discovering traces of Mrs. Westlake, and it is not strange that this proved the case, because she was dead and buried, as I subsequently discovered from the prisoner at the bar. It is not necessary to go into details, as they do not concern the case in point, but Mrs. Westlake had committed suicide while in a fit of delirium tremens by throwing herself from the window of her dwelling."

"This act occurred while I was on a voyage to China, and before my return the matter had been quite forgotten in the other transpiring events of the day."

Here Baxter gave a concise narration of his meeting with our hero, and of the subsequent discovery of the iron chest in the cemetery, which contained a statement made by the dead woman, revealing the proper parents of Billy Button, and the part played in the affair by Starbuck Hanlon, and other subsequent matters that are already known to the reader.

"It is quite evident," said Baxter, in conclusion, "that Hanlon stole that chest in the first instance, hoping to find either money or some such papers as it contained, but owing to the intricate and carefully constructed machinery of the secret compartment of the lid, was baffled in his search. How it came to be in the cemetery, I have as yet been unable to discover and, perhaps, I never shall, unless my former confederate consents to make a clean breast of it."

"This, I think, is about all I have to say, with the exception that some weeks since I received intelligence that Mrs. Hubert had died in the asylum and had been buried in the private plot of her brother."

"This information led me to infer that the body taken by the resurrectionists on the night of the discovery of the chest, was that of Mrs. Hubert; but I have since found that the corpse was one of Mr. Rathbone's servants, whom he had privately buried in his own plot. This was good news, but I received much more satisfactory information this morning. Mrs. Hubert is not dead—she is not even insane. She has recovered her reason, and is safe and sound at the residence of her brother, James Rathbone, at Jamaica."

"No!" shouted a manly voice at the door. "She is here to claim her son!"

Every eye turned in the direction of the speaker.

He was a tall, manly-looking man, and clinging to his arm was a lady dressed in deep black and closely veiled.

As they came slowly down the court-room Billy Button arose to his feet, seizing the back of a chair to support himself.

His face was deadly pale and his knees trembled violently.

"Where is my boy?" said the anxious mother, tossing back her veil and looking beseechingly around the court.

"Here, mother! Dear—dear mother!"

In a second the two who had been so long separated were clasped in a loving embrace.

It was a touching spectacle, which those who witnessed it will remember as long as they live.

There was not a dry eye in the whole room; even those hard-hearted, cast-iron-bound individuals, the members of the press, stopped taking notes to use their handkerchiefs.

Let us drop the curtain on the tableau. The drama is ended.

Starbuck Hanlon received his just deserts and is serving a long term in Sing Sing.

Jethro Baxter still lives, but he has given up business. He is a frequent visitor at the residence of Mr. Rathbone.

When Billy found his mother he found a jolly little playmate also.

He calls her Rosebud, but her real name is Maria. It was formerly Maria Rathbone but it is Hubert now.

There are several little Huberts running around the Hubert mansion, but the youngest, who is the only son, is called by his mother,

"BILLY BUTTON!" [THE END.]



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